

**THE PROBLEMS OF CONFUCIANISM IN THE LATE
WARRING STATES PERIOD AND XUNZI'S
RECONSTRUCTION OF CONFUCIANISM**

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Summary

This thesis aims to examine the problems Confucianism encountered in the late Warring States period and how Xunzi solved these problems and reconstructed Confucianism by incorporating other non-Confucian schools' teachings.

This thesis examines the problems Confucianism encountered in terms of knowledge, human nature and politics. In the aspect of knowledge, Confucius' broad learning became unbalanced and incomplete in Mencius' teachings, which could not meet the need of the time. In contrast, Xunzi argued for a broad learning and borrowed the terms *xu*, *yi* and *jing* from Zhuangzi to reconstruct the Confucian teachings about knowledge. In the aspect of human nature, Mencius' view that human *xing* is good is not plausible and could not provide a better basis for Confucian theory of moral cultivation and good government. In contrast, Xunzi argued for the view that human *xing* is bad and pointed out the way of cultivating bad human *xing* to be good. In the aspect of politics, Mencius' teachings could not provide an effective approach for attaining the ideal of good government. In contrast, Xunzi argued for *li* associated with *fa*, which might be borrowed from Shang Yang, as the way for achieving good government. This thesis argues that Xunzi not only remained within the Confucian tradition, but also improved former Confucians' teachings to a great extent.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

What Will We Argue in This Thesis?

Xunzi, a great thinker living in the late Warring States period of ancient China, received many criticisms from Chinese philosophers, including Confucian scholars. Contrary to the various criticisms and suspicions of Xunzi's Confucian identity, in this dissertation, I will argue that Xunzi is a Confucian who not only adhered to the teachings of Confucius, but also improved the Confucian teachings to a great extent. Without the effort of Xunzi, it is hard to imagine that Confucianism could prevail over other intellectual thoughts and flourish in later generations.¹

Basically, this dissertation will argue for the following theses:

1. Xunzi not only continued but improved Confucius' teachings;
2. Xunzi improved Confucianism by incorporating the thought of other schools of Chinese philosophy;
3. Xunzi incorporated the thought of other schools in order to strengthen Confucianism theoretically and thereby make it more persuasive and practical for his times in order to achieve the Confucian moral and political ideals more effectively.

This dissertation will elucidate the above with a detailed philosophical study of the text of *Xunzi* that compares it with other texts from the Warring States period. From the detailed textual comparison between the *Xunzi* and other texts, we could see the

¹ Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism and Legalism are the conventional English terms for the various schools of thought in the East Zhou period, although the schools were so identified only from the Han Dynasty onwards.

similarities between Xunzi and these non-Confucians in terms of some important issues and how non-Confucian teaching could be helpful in improving Confucianism to be more adaptable to the time and in achieving Confucian moral and political ideals.

As many commentators and thinkers have noticed, Xunzi not only inherited the Confucian tradition, but also integrated other philosophical traditions, such as Taoism, Mohism and Legalism, into his own philosophy. This may be the reason why Xunzi is easily misunderstood to be a non-Confucian. However, in my view, Xunzi did not become a non-Confucian just because of his incorporation of other schools' teachings. In fact, Xunzi's incorporation of these other schools' teachings was for the purpose of improving Confucianism. I shall examine in detail these other schools' influences on Xunzi and see how they improve Confucianism.

An interesting question emerges here: why did Xunzi integrate these other thoughts from very different philosophical traditions, even traditions explicitly opposed to Confucianism? If they are for the improvement of Confucianism, what are the problems in Confucianism he intended them to solve? From the second to fourth chapter, I will investigate and assess the nature of these problems and Xunzi's solutions. The problems of Confucian teachings include its theories of knowing, human *xing*, and politics, to which most of its important teachings are related.

Confucianism is a practice-oriented school concerned with cultivating people to be moral and formulating a good government and an orderly society. As various sayings in the *Analects* indicate, it is important to apply one's moral learning or

knowledge.² In this sense, its theories must be plausible enough to be put into practice.

Confucian teachings of knowing encountered a series of problems in the late Warring States period. For example, Mencius' teachings of knowing premised on good human *xing* (human nature) and focusing on moral relationships could not secure a good socio-political order in a time of chaos and disorders, not to mention the attainment of Confucian ideals. The frequent wars and miserable living conditions made it especially hard for people to believe that human beings are good in nature, as Mencius claimed. More importantly, it is really difficult to expect a person to cultivate himself to be moral without any external compulsion. As to political teachings, Mencius could not provide an effective approach to achieve a good government ruled by a sage king in the late Warring States period. Thus, these problems reflect one common problem: Confucianism has lost touch with the reality of the late Warring States period. To improve Confucianism and achieve Confucian ideals, its theoretical assumptions as well as arguments for moral cultivation and good government need to be revised to be more realistic. Otherwise, Confucianism could not even survive, not to mention flourish. In this dissertation, I will show how the need to revise and improve Confucianism led Xunzi to integrate other schools' teachings on knowledge, human nature and politics into Confucian teachings.

The problems of Confucianism in the late Warring States period and the solutions Xunzi provided are very important for scholarship since they touch on important

² Refer to D. C. Lau, trans., *The Analects* (London: The Penguin Group, Penguin Books, 1979), 1.1, also 6.23.

questions in the history of Confucianism, with implications for contemporary understanding of the tradition. An in-depth study of Xunzi's improvement on Confucianism would help us understand how the Confucian tradition evolved in its long history to become a predominant intellectual tradition in ancient China. Xunzi's method of incorporating non-Confucian thought is one that has been repeatedly used in a tradition that has weathered the changes of more than two millennia. Some contemporary works on Xunzi have acknowledged that Xunzi incorporated some non-Confucian teachings into his own teachings. However, the reason why Xunzi did so is inadequately explained. Is it out of arbitrary personal preference? Or is it to improve Confucian teachings? If it is to improve Confucian teachings, Confucian teachings must have encountered some problems that need to be solved. If so, what are these problems and what elicit or exacerbate these problems? Could Xunzi's strategy effectively and successfully solve these problems? These questions, unfortunately, are not fully and effectively answered in current scholarship.

Xunzi's strategy of solving the Confucian problems in the late Warring States period, such as his emphasis of *li* and *fa*, provided an important pattern for modeling a Confucian society in the contemporary world. Although the situation is different from the time Xunzi lived in, Xunzi's approach in bringing about or maintaining a good social order is especially important for our time, which is still endangered by the occasional wars and conflicts. In addition, the problems Confucianism encountered is not specific to the late Warring States period. The problems lie not in Confucian moral and political ideals, which are attractive for the people, but in the approach in

achieving the ideals. Whether it is in the late Warring States period or later dynasties, the problem of the approach in achieving Confucian ideals would always exist. So, it is significant to make an in-depth study on the approaches former Confucians including Xunzi assumed and compare their differences, from which we could know why the later dynasties followed Xunzi's approach in governing. In this case, this thesis will also contribute to the understanding of the political system in ancient China. However, due to the differences among former Confucians and Xunzi, not all philosophers thought that Xunzi's doctrine was still Confucian.

Debate on Xunzi's Confucian Status

Xunzi's Confucian status is a matter of debate among later scholars. In the Han Dynasty, Sima Qian, the prominent historian of Han Dynasty, regarded Xunzi as the great Confucian after Mencius. In the *Shi Ji*, he juxtaposed the biography of Xunzi with that of Mencius and praised Xunzi for condemning the turbulent politics in the late Warring States period and dispelling the superstition prevailing in his time. The most important contribution attributed to Xunzi was his detailed review of the success and failure of Confucianism, Mohism, and Daoism in his extensive works.³ In the view of Sima Qian, Xunzi realized that Confucianism had been endangered due to the misinterpretations of mediocre Confucian followers. Some non-Confucians, such as Zhuangzi, also posed a challenge to Confucianism. Xunzi felt that it was his own responsibility to defend and reconstruct Confucianism and refute other schools'

³ See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shi Ji* 史記, vol. 74 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), p. 2348.

challenges. In the preface of *Shi Ji*, Sima Qian argued that Xunzi's teachings clarified general rationales of rituals and moral principles. Han Confucians regarded Xunzi as very important in transmitting and interpreting the Confucian classical texts. Due to Xunzi's emphasis on learning the classics, which include the *Documents* (*Shang Shu*), *Odes* (*Shi Jing*), *Rituals* (*Li*), *Music* (*Yue*), and *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chun Qiu*), Confucianism in Han dynasty established the tradition of studying classics, which is later called *Jing Xue* 經學 or *Han Xue* 漢學. For this reason, Liu Xiang wrote a book to evaluate Xunzi's position in the history of Confucianism, in which he argued that only Xunzi and Mencius could respect and inherit the teachings of Confucius.⁴

During the Song and Ming dynasties, when generally Xunzi was condemned as a legalist while Mencius was admired as a true Confucian, there were still some scholars who defended Xunzi's Confucian identity. For example, Gui Youguang, a scholar in Ming Dynasty, regarded Xunzi as the only Confucian who was capable of understanding the teachings of Confucius in the late Warring States period. In this case, Xunzi should be regarded equally important as Mencius in the history of Confucianism.⁵ Another famous scholar Li Zhi argued that Xunzi's teachings were wiser than those of Mencius and not pedantic. Xunzi followed the teachings of Confucius with his unique style. Xunzi was also listed as one of the top virtuous Confucians by Li Zhi.⁶

In Qing dynasty, textual research focusing on studying the classics became

⁴ Liu Xiang 劉向, "Sunqing shulu 孫卿書錄," in Yan Kejun (ed.), *Quan shanggusandai qinhan sanguo liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文, vol. 1 (Taipei: World Book, 1969).

⁵ Gui Youguang 歸有光, "Xunzi xulu 荀子敘錄," in *Zhenchuan xiansheng ji* 震川先生集, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), p. 20.

⁶ Li Zhi 李贄, "Xun Qing 荀卿," in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol.302 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), pp. 219-221.

prevalent. Generally, Qing scholars studying the classics preferred *Han Xue*, which emphasized textual evidence and practical attitude in learning, in direct contrast to Song-Ming Confucianism, which focused on speculative thinking and disputations. In such intellectual context, Xunzi's teachings were stressed. Wang Zhong wrote two books, *Xunqingzi tonglun*, and *Xunqingzi nianbiao*, which focused on discussing the relationship between Xunzi and Confucius, and regarded Xunzi as an inheritor of the teachings of Confucius.⁷ Dai Zhen, another famous scholar in Qing Dynasty, regarded Xunzi as different from Laozi, Zhuangzi and Gaozi; instead, he was affirmed as a follower of Confucius.⁸

Although these scholars regarded Xunzi as a great Confucian after Confucius and Mencius, there have been different opinions on his Confucian identity. Han Yu, a Confucian in Tang Dynasty, claimed that there were no great Confucians after Mencius, and Xunzi did not inherit the teachings of Confucius. Zhu Xi, a Confucian in Song Dynasty, even condemned Xunzi as a representative of Legalism. He once told his students that they should not pay heed to Xunzi but only need to focus on Mencius. In Zhu Xi's view, Xunzi did not know the way of Confucianism since he only focused on law and punishment in his teachings, as seen in his book *Cheng Xiang*. Thus, Xunzi was not a Confucian.⁹ This dissertation tries to show how biased and inaccurate this view is.

⁷ Wang Zhong 汪中, "Xunzi tonglun 荀卿子通論," in *Beijing tushuguan cangzhenben nianpu congkan* 北京圖書館藏珍本年譜叢刊, vol.5 (Beijing: Beijing Library Press, 1999), pp. 622-625; "Xunqingzi nianbiao 荀卿子年表," in *Beijing tushuguan cangzhenben nianpu congkan* 北京圖書館藏珍本年譜叢刊, vol.5 (Beijing: Beijing Library Press, 1999), pp. 613-622.

⁸ Dai Zhen 戴震, "Xuyan 緒言," in *Congshu jicheng xinbian* 叢書集成新編, vol. 23 (Taipei: Shin Wen Feng Print, 1984), p. 655.

⁹ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhuji yulei* 朱子語類, vol.137 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), pp. 3253-3255.

Some current Chinese scholars also claim that Xunzi is not a Confucian just because of his incorporation of some non-Confucian teachings. Those making this claim would have us believe that Xunzi incorporated some non-Confucian teachings for the sake of developing non-Confucian teachings instead of improving Confucianism. Zhao Jihui, for example, argues that Xunzi is a representative of Huang-Lao learning, a special development in the history of Daoism.¹⁰ Zhao argues that Xunzi's teachings did not adhere to that of Confucius and Mencius. The opposition between Mencius and Xunzi especially shows that Xunzi deviated from the Confucian course. In this case, since Xunzi's teachings were similar to Huang-Lao's teachings in some aspects, he should be regarded as a representative of Huang-Lao school. Zhao's argument, however, is very superficial and arbitrary, since his comparisons only focus on the difference in the terms they used while neglecting how Xunzi employed non-Confucian terms to solve Confucian problems and make Confucian points. Thus, Zhao's partial interpretation of Xunzi's text is very problematic.

Other Chinese scholars, such as Yu Mingguang, are more careful in defining Xunzi's status. In an article translated into English, after comparing the similarities between the teachings of Xunzi and Huang-Lao school, Yu argues as follows,

To sum up, even though Xunzi was a prominent Confucian scholar of the late Warring States period, his philosophy contained much of the quintessence of Daoist culture. The outworn and declining character of Confucianism of the late

¹⁰ Refer to Zhao Jihui 趙吉惠, "Lun Xunzi shi jixiahuanglao zhixue 論荀學是稷下黃老之學," *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 道家文化研究, no. 4, 1997.

Warring States period made Xunzi take up the historical task of reforming and reviving Confucianism. Therefore, beginning with Xunzi, Confucianism extensively assimilated Daoist culture and, in particular, the ideas of the Daoist Huang-Lao school of thought, and absorbed their best achievements. Thus, a Confucian “theory of the Way” was created, opening new ways for the renewal of Confucianism. “Confucianist appearance, Daoist contents” became characteristic of the new Confucianism.¹¹

Yu’s conclusion is not so radical as that of Zhao and probably is more accurate than Zhao’s judgment on Xunzi. However, the claim of “Confucianist appearance, Daoist contents” overshoots the mark. I shall argue that Xunzi did not become a Daoist while appearing to be a Confucian. On the contrary, Daoist thought is only part of the “appearance”, while Confucianism is the real “content” of his teachings. Yu’s view overstates the influence of Daoism on Xunzi. Aside from Daoism, there are probably other non-Confucian thoughts influencing him, such as Shang Yang’s teachings (which were later identified as Legalism) and Mozi’s teachings. All these non-Confucian teachings, although influencing Xunzi to different extents, did not become the core of Xunzi’s thoughts, which remained Confucian. Thus, although some scholars have touched on the issue of Xunzi’s assimilation of non-Confucian teachings, an in-depth and careful study focusing on a detailed comparison of the text of Xunzi with the texts from other traditions that influenced him has yet to be undertaken.

¹¹ Yu Mingguang, “Xunzi’s Philosophy and the School of Huang-Lao,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, vol. 34, no.1, 2002, p. 60.

Li Zehou, a Chinese scholar, makes an acute assessment on Xunzi's Confucian status:

From Song-Ming Confucianism to Modern Neo-Confucianism, Xunzi was usually criticized and Mencius praised accordingly. They thought the course from Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming to Mencius was the mainstream and orthodoxy of history of Chinese thought. However, the studies on Xunzi in the past thirty years in this country either merely praised Xunzi's materialism or simply criticized his legalist inclination which respects the rulers and exalts the rituals (*zunjun shangli* 尊君尚禮). All these scholars seemed not to grasp the pith of Xunzi's teachings. Although Mencius had a splendid aspect, however, if Confucianism followed Mencius' course totally, it was quite possible that Confucianism would lapse into mysticism and religion. It is because Xunzi emphasized the conscious effort of human beings, and radically opposed Mencius' view of human nature as good with his naturalistic view of human nature as bad that the mystical inclination in Confucianism was overcome and diluted. At the same time, since Xunzi tried to assimilate the rational and practical factor from the teachings of Mohism, Daoism, and Legalism, Confucianism was greatly enhanced in terms of emphasizing conscious effort of human beings and society. In this case, the optimistic ideal of human life in Confucianism is exalted to the cosmological level of "triad with Heaven and Earth".¹²

Li's comment on Xunzi is quite accurate and realizes the importance of Xunzi in the

¹² Li Zehou 李澤厚, *Zhongguo sixiangshi lun* 中國思想史論, vol. 1 (Hefei: Anhui wenyi chubanshe, 1999), pp. 124-125. Translation mine.

history of Chinese thought. In this dissertation, I will argue in more detail why it is so.

Who is a True Confucian?

To see if Xunzi is a Confucian or not, we should make clear the meaning and possible implications of the term “Confucian,” which is the English term used to refer to a group the Chinese called *ru* (儒). The *Ru* school of teachings could be traced back to a much earlier time than Confucius.

The *Ru* wear round caps on their heads to show that they understand the cycles of heaven, that they walk about in square shoes to show that they understand the shape of the earth, and they tie ornaments in the shape of a broken disc at their girdles in order to show that, when the time comes for decisive action, they must ‘make the break.’¹³

This description indicates a broader understanding of *Ru* than the followers of Confucius. The scholars in Han dynasty defined *Ru* as follows:

Ru ...is the name of the versatile.¹⁴

A man who understands thoroughly Heaven, Earth and Human could be called *Ru*.¹⁵

According to Hu Shih,¹⁶ the term *Ru* possibly refers to the Yin people, who inherited and practiced the ritual knowledge of Yin. It is only when *Ru* came to be associated

¹³ Burton Watson, trans. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), chap. 21, p. 227.

¹⁴ Xu Shen 許慎, *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, Zang Kehe and Wang Ping (eds.) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), p. 519.

¹⁵ Yang Xiong 楊雄, “Fayan 法言,” in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol.933 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), p. 306.

¹⁶ Hu Shih 胡適, *Shuo Ru* 說儒, chap. 2 and 5 (Xian: Shanxi Normal University Press, 2005).

with Confucius who had a distinctive teaching that *Ru* was specifically understood as the school of Confucius. Han Fei, a Legalist and disciple of Xunzi in the late Warring States period, commented on the history of *Ru* as follows:

The peak *Ru* attained is Confucius; ...while afterwards, the *Ru* divided into eight schools.¹⁷

It is the scholars of Han dynasty who equated *Ru* teachings with Confucius' teachings.

Confucius cultivated the Way of Zhou Kings Cheng and Kang (*chengkang zhidao* 成康之道), reiterated the teachings of the Duke of Zhou (*zhougong* 周公), to teach seventy disciples. He prompted them to write and revise the classical texts and cultivated them to be the pupils of *Ru*.¹⁸

In the *Han Shu*, Ban Gu wrote:

The school of *Ru*...emphasizes benevolence and rightness, reiterates Yao and Shun, emulate Zhou Kings, Wen and Wu, and regards Confucius as the grand teacher.¹⁹

Although "Confucianism" is a term invented by the Jesuits and not without controversy, I shall use it to refer to the teachings of Confucius and his followers, while "Confucians" refers to the followers of Confucius. Han Fei claimed that after the death of Confucius, the Confucian camp was divided into eight different branches, namely, that of Zizhang, Zisi, Yanshi, Mengshi, Qidiaoshi, Zhongliangshi, Sunshi and

¹⁷ D. C. Lau and Chen Fong Ching (eds.), *A Concordance to the Hanfeizi* (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 2000), chap. 50, p. 150.

¹⁸ Xu Kuangyi (ed.), *Huainanzi quanyi* 淮南子全譯, chap.21 (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1993), pp. 1263-1264.

¹⁹ Ban Gu, *Hanshu yiwenzhi* 漢書藝文志 (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1955), p. 25.

Lezhengshi.²⁰ Each of these Confucian schools regarded itself as the true *Ru*, but in Han Fei's view,

since we cannot call Confucius and Mo Tzu back to life, who is to decide which of the present versions of the doctrine is the right one?²¹

Xunzi also criticized contemporaries who called themselves Confucians:

Their caps bent and twisted, their robes billowing and flowing, they move to and fro as though they were a Yu or a Shun—such are the base *Ru* of Zizhang's school. Wearing their caps in perfectly correct form, maintaining their expression in perfect equanimity, they sit there all day long as though they were about to gag on a bit, but say nothing—such are the base *Ru* of the school of Zixia. Evasive and timorous, disliking work, lacking integrity, shameless, interested only in food and drink, they insist that “a gentleman naturally would not engage in manual labor”—such are the base *Ru* of the school of Ziyou.²²

Obviously, Xunzi did not regard the schools of Zizhang, Zixia and Ziyou as the true *Ru*. Xunzi also criticized the teachings of Zisi and Mencius.

Some men follow the model of the Ancient Kings in a fragmentary way, but they do not understand its guiding principles...Mysterious and enigmatic, it lacks a satisfactory theoretical basis. Esoteric and laconic in its statement, it lacks adequate explanations... Zisi provided the tune for them, and Mencius harmonized it. The stupid, indecisive, deluded *Ru* of today enthusiastically

²⁰ Burton Watson, *Han Fei Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 118.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² John Knoblock, trans. *Xunzi—A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vol. 1 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 6.13.

welcome these notions, unaware that they are false. They pass on what they have received, believing that, on account of these theories, Confucius and Zigong would be highly esteemed by later generations. This is the error of Zisi and Mencius.²³

In Xunzi's view, the teachings of Zisi, Mencius and other Confucians in his time lacked theoretical basis and adequate explanations. In addition, these teachings deviated from the original teachings of Confucius and Zi Gong.²⁴ Thus, what are the true *Ru* teachings in Xunzi's view?

The *Ru* model themselves after the Ancient Kings; they exalt ritual and moral principles; as ministers and sons they are careful to esteem their superiors to the highest degree.²⁵

In this sense, Xunzi regarded a Confucian as a person who could emulate the way of ancient sage kings and exalt the rituals and moral principles. Although Zisi and Mencius professed to follow the teachings of Confucius, they did not seem to understand or practice them. Thus, in Xunzi's view, the teachings of Confucius is pure and correct; while most later generations who professed to be Confucians could not follow the original teachings of Confucius, and interpreted them in aberrant ways. Xunzi tried to seek and follow the teachings of true Confucians and analyzed the problems encountered by Confucianism to deliver specific solutions to them.

²³ *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 6.7. There is some translation difficulty here: it seems that this passage means that it is the deluded *Ru* who misinterpreted Zisi and Mencius, who are the true Confucians. However, this passage could also mean that Zisi, Mencius and the deluded *Ru* are equally deluded about Confucius' teachings, that is, the deluded *Ru* are the followers of Zisi and Mencius.

²⁴ Zi Gong 子弓 is a disciple of Zi Xia 子夏, who is also a disciple of Confucius. The teachings of Zi Gong put more stress on studying the classical texts.

²⁵ John Knoblock, trans. *Xunzi—A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vol. 2 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 8.2.

Many Han dynasty scholars, such as Sima Tan, Liu Xiang and Ban Gu, had set forth their opinions about the defining features of Confucianism. According to Sima Tan, Confucianism emphasizes the importance of rituals.²⁶ For Ban Gu, Confucianism is the school that emphasizes the rituals, edification, benevolence, and admires the ancient kings and Confucius.²⁷ It seems appropriate that the teachings of Confucius, as recorded in the *Analects*, should define true Confucianism to start with. Song-Ming neo-Confucians judged whether one is a Confucian by comparing with both Confucius and Mencius, sometimes even favoring Mencius over Confucius. This is quite unreasonable as being different from Mencius does not stop one from being a Confucian in the sense of being a follower of Confucius. When there is a conflict between Mencius and other Confucians, we should prefer Confucius' teachings in the *Analects* as the guide. But when Confucius is silent on some issues while Mencius and other Confucians hold different views, we should examine which addition better develop Confucius' views. In this case, only examining the similarities between Confucius and his followers might not be enough to judge the followers' Confucian status. We might also need to allow for the development of Confucius' teachings in the way the implicit thoughts in *Analects* are brought out and even added to by later Confucians. Thus, we may suggest the key characteristics of Confucianism as follows:

1. Follows the teachings of Confucius as recorded in the *Analects*;
2. Admires and praises the ancient kings like Yao, Shun, and King Wen and Wu;

²⁶ Sima Tan 司馬談, "Lun liujia yaozhi 論六家要旨," in Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shi Ji* 史記, vol. 130, p. 3289.

²⁷ Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu yiwenzhi* 漢書藝文志, p. 25.

3. Advocates benevolence or humane and moral principles;
4. Advocates rituals;
5. Emphasizes self-cultivation and education;
6. Regards *Liujiing* 六經, the six classics, as the basis of learning.

According to the above defining characteristics, we can examine Xunzi's status as a Confucian.

Xunzi—the Confucian

Although Xunzi's "Contra Twelve Philosophers" criticized most schools at that time, he respected and praised Confucius very highly. Xunzi said,

Should he once occupy the position of grand officer, a single ruler could not keep him to himself, and a single state could not contain him. The greatness of his reputation would exceed that of the feudal lords, each of whom would long to employ him as their minister. Even such a sage does not always gain a position of power. Such were Confucius and Zi Gong.²⁸

So, in Xunzi's view, Confucius did not belong to any single state; instead he belonged to the world, in which he was the sage king. Thus, "the moral authority of Confucius was equal to that of the Duke of Zhou and his reputation was on an equal footing with that of the Three Kings."

Such a great Ru, ... will beat down and crush aggressive states and make uniform and united the whole world, and none will be able to overthrow

²⁸ *Xunzi*, vol.1, 6.8.

him—this is evidence of a great Ru.....If he is successful in obtaining office, he will unify the world. If he is unsuccessful, he will establish alone a noble reputation. Heaven cannot kill it, earth bury it, the age of a Jie or Robber Zhi tarnish it. None but a great Ru can establish such a reputation: such were Confucius and Zi Gong.²⁹

Xunzi definitely regarded Confucius as the central figure of Confucianism and the sage whom he always admired.

Second, Xunzi admired the sage kings Yao, Shun and King Wen and King Wu. In *Xiu Shen*, he said, “If you use it (moral principles and being trustworthy) to cultivate your character and strengthen your self, you will establish a reputation equal to that of Yao or Yu.”³⁰ In the book *Wang Ba*, he said,

Tang began with Bo and King Wu with Hao, both territories only a hundred li square, yet they unified the world, made the feudal lords their servants, so that wherever news of them penetrated there were none who did not submit to them and follow after them. This was due to no other cause than that they perfected moral principles. This is what is called moral principles being established and becoming a universal king.³¹

Third, Xunzi always admired and advocated the moral principle of *ren* (benevolence or humaneness). He said,

These four Ancestors and two kings all marched throughout the whole world with an army that was humane and just. Thus, people who were nearby were

²⁹ *Xunzi*, vol.2, 8.9.

³⁰ *Xunzi*, vol.1, 2.2.

³¹ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 11.1b.

attracted by their goodness, and those who were in remote regions longed for their justice.³²

He also argued for carrying out benevolence so that the people could live in happiness. “Conduct marked by humanity, justice, and inner power is normally the method of assuring safety.”³³ As for the ritual, Xunzi regarded it as the fundamental principle in his philosophy.

...A lord of men who exalts ritual principles and honors worthy men will become a True King...³⁴

...follow the requirements of ritual principles, good order penetrates every aspect of his activity. But when this is not so, then his actions become unreasonable and disorderly, dilatory and negligent. Thus, a man without ritual will not live; an undertaking lacking ritual will not be completed; and a nation without ritual will not be tranquil.³⁵

Rituals also play an important part in the education that Xunzi argued for.

A people that is not taught will have no means of introducing rational order into their inborn nature. Hence, ...The way to guide them is to establish colleges, set up academies and schools, cultivate the six types of ritual observances, and elucidate the seven teachings.³⁶

In the chapter, “Man’s Nature is Evil,” he pointed out that education changes a person from his or her bad nature to become good.

³² *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 15.2.

³³ *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 4.8.

³⁴ John Knoblock, trans. *Xunzi—A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vol. 3 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 17.9.

³⁵ *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 2.2.

³⁶ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 27.52.

Now, if the man in the street were induced to cleave to these methods, engage in study, focus his mind on a single aim, unify his intentions, ponder these principles, accomplish them each day over a long period of time, and to accumulate what is good without slacking off, then he could penetrate as far as spiritual intelligence and could form a Triad with Heaven and Earth. Thus the sage is a man who has reached this high state through accumulated effort.³⁷

Xunzi also respected the teacher as an important part of education. He said, “When a country is on the verge of a great florescence, it is certain to prize its teachers and give great importance to breadth of learning.”³⁸

Xunzi regarded the *Six Classics* as the core lesson of learning and it is necessary for the gentleman to be proficient in them.

Its proper method is to start with the recitation of the Classics and conclude with the reading of the *Rituals*. Its real purpose is first to create a scholar and in the end to create a sage....The reverence and refinement of the *Rituals*, the concord and harmony of the *Music*, the breadth of the *Odes* and *Documents*, the subtlety of the *Annals*—all the creations of Heaven and Earth are completed in them.³⁹

Although Xunzi did not include *yi* (易) in the above quote, we can see in his text that he quoted many passages from *yi* to demonstrate his meanings. In this sense, we might say that Xunzi was also likely to regard *yi* as a source of learning. From the above analyses, we could see that Xunzi was very much a Confucian, in spite of the various disputes over his Confucian status.

³⁷ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 23.5a.

³⁸ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 27.93.

³⁹ *Xunzi*, vol.1, 1.8.

Methodology of This Thesis

This dissertation aims to demonstrate how Xunzi assimilated other non-Confucian schools' teachings into Confucianism to solve the problems of Confucianism in the late Warring States period. Due to the length and scope of this thesis, I could not discuss all non-Confucian thinkers whose teachings could have influenced Xunzi's philosophy, but limit the thesis only to the most relevant of these thinkers and their teachings. Even though I have not covered all possible influences, the examples of such influence I have chosen should be sufficient to elucidate how Xunzi went about improving Confucianism with non-Confucian teachings, without abandoning Confucianism altogether.

How could we identify these non-Confucian schools as influencing Xunzi? The methodology applied in this dissertation is in-depth textual study of the *Xunzi* and textual comparison between the *Xunzi* and other Warring States texts. Throughout the comparison between Xunzi and other texts, we find many striking similarities among them. For example, Xunzi's view of human *xing* as bad is rather similar to Shang Yang's view of human *xing* as profit-loving.

Of course, textual similarity alone could not establish conclusively that Xunzi was influenced by some non-Confucian texts like *Shang Jun Shu*. We could not even know exactly if the extant *Shang Jun Shu* or *Zhuang Zi*, which are used in our textual comparison, were available to Xunzi. Nevertheless, as current scholarship has established some facts about Xunzi's biography and the time when these non-Confucian thinkers lived, we could at least say that Xunzi was quite possibly

influenced by the thoughts of these non-Confucian thinkers in his career. For example, since we know that Xunzi had visited the Qin state, which had carried out Shang Yang's reforms, Xunzi would have seen many things related to Shang Yang's reform and became familiar with Shang Yang's philosophy. Thus, even if Xunzi had never seen the extant *Shang Jun Shu*, he at least knew something about Shang Yang's philosophy during his stay in Qin. This supports the thesis that Xunzi's view of human *xing* was influenced by Shang Yang, and any similarities between the *Xunzi* and the *Shang Jun Shu* point further in the same direction.

We might never know whether Xunzi was really influenced by some particular non-Confucian thinkers unless he mentioned them explicitly in his text. The influence is however a reasonable supposition of the relationship between Xunzi's text and other non-Confucians' texts. What I shall do in this dissertation is to add some supporting evidence for establishing a relationship of influence without proving its truth. In this dissertation, what is more important is to identify the elements in the *Xunzi*, whatever their source, that resemble non-Confucian thought, and show how and to what extent they improve Confucianism in the context of the late Warring States period. We know that Confucianism have encountered serious problems and challenges, most of which were caused by its theories losing touch with reality. In this case, to find out why these non-Confucian teachings were flourishing and posed a great challenge to Confucianism in this period while Confucianism declined and lost touch with the time is significant for the study of Confucianism.

Through the textual study of Confucian texts and non-Confucian texts, we could

elucidate how some thoughts of these non-Confucian texts could be very helpful in improving Confucianism in the late Warring States period. In this regard, Xunzi may be regarded as a precursor of later Confucians (Song and Ming Neo-Confucians, and Modern New Confucians) who adopted the same strategy and incorporated different non-Confucian teachings into Confucianism for the same reason. In this sense, one might say that Xunzi set a methodological precedent within the history of Confucianism.

CHAPTER TWO

CONFUCIAN TEACHINGS ON *ZHI* (KNOWLEDGE/WISDOM)

Epistemology in Confucianism is often neglected, in comparison with the lasting attention paid to Confucian ethics or political philosophy. Many believe that in Chinese philosophy generally, the concerns of knowledge “never became separate divisions of Chinese philosophy.”¹ However, the lack of scholarly interest in the topic of *zhi*, usually translated as knowledge or wisdom, in Confucianism does not mean that it is trivial or insignificant.² Although the topic of *zhi* is not the focus of discussion in early Confucianism, this study will nevertheless start with the analysis of *zhi*. This is because understanding *zhi*, even though quite different from Western epistemology in its focus and implications, is the first and most important step in achieving an understanding of the moral and political ideals in Confucianism, or even in Chinese philosophy.

The term *zhi*, which appears in the *Analects* and other pre-Qin Confucian texts, besides being translated as “knowledge,” “knowing,” “to know,” “one who knows,” could also be translated as “wisdom” or “the wise.” Early Confucian discussions of *zhi* are usually in relation to learning, thinking and the practice of moral conduct, which are believed to be the most important ways of knowing (or wisdom).

This chapter tries to make it clear that Xunzi’s teachings on *zhi* developed a kind

¹ Frederick W. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 94.

² The topic of knowing became a focus of later Confucians, such as Wang Yangming, who argued for the integration of knowing and practicing (*zhixing heyi*). A recent book by Warren G. Frisina, *The Unity of Knowledge and Action: Toward a Nonrepresentational Theory of Knowledge* (New York: State University of New York, 2002), have extensive discussion on this topic.

of methodology for making Confucianism more adaptable to its time, ordered towards the realization of moral and political ideals. This contrasts with former Confucian teachings which emphasized the transmission of texts and preservation of ritual practices without much regard for historical change. In this case, Xunzi broadened the way of knowing, which involves both learning and thinking, and he assimilated the terms, *xu*, *yi* and *jing* from Zhuangzi to provide more guidance on how to think in order to adapt Confucian teachings to the times and achieve Confucian ideals.

Learning (*Xue* 學)

According to Confucius,

Those who are born with knowledge (*zhi* 知) are the highest. Next come those who attain knowledge through study. Next again come those who turn to study after having been vexed by difficulties. The common people, in so far as they make no effort to study even after having been vexed by difficulties, are the lowest.³

Confucius never did explicitly identify those born with knowledge in the *Analects*. A possible reason is that such talents are probably too rare to be worth talking about or building a philosophy on. What Confucius did emphasize, however, is the second way of becoming knowledgeable: attaining *zhi* through learning. To acquire knowledge, they must be willing to learn.

Confucius admitted that he was not born with knowledge.⁴ Rather he acquired

³ *The Analects*, 16.9.

⁴ Refer to *The Analects*, 7.20.

his intelligence through learning diligently. His view was that only the man who was eager to learn could be called a gentleman (*junzi*).

The gentleman seeks neither a full belly nor a comfortable home. He is quick in action but cautious in speech. He goes to men possessed of the Way to be put right. Such a man can be described as eager to learn.⁵

Confucius emphasized the important role of learning in attaining *zhi*. Confucius said,

I once spent all day thinking without taking food and all night thinking without going to bed, but I found that I gained nothing from it. It would have been better for me to have spent the time in learning.⁶

Therefore, thinking alone could not give us knowledge. One needs to learn.

Mencius also emphasized the important role of learning. He wrote:

Learn widely and go into what you have learned in detail so that in the end you can return to the essential.⁷

Similarly for Mencius, there is an important connection between learning and an orderly state.

When those above ignore the rites, those below ignore learning, and lawless people arise, then the end of the state is at hand.⁸

However, there is some difference between Mencius and Confucius with regard to *zhi*. For Mencius, everyone is born with a “sprout” of *zhi* which needs to be developed into Confucian sagely wisdom. Mencius claimed further that all people are

⁵ *The Analects*, 1.14.

⁶ *The Analects*, 15.31.

⁷ D. C. Lau, trans., *Mencius* (London: The Penguin Group, Penguin Books, 1970), 4B15.

⁸ *Mencius*, 4A1.

born with *liangzhi*.

What a man is able to do without having to learn it is what he can truly do; what he knows without having to reflect on it is what he truly knows (*liangzhi* 良知).⁹ So, for Mencius, it is important that *zhi* includes naturally endowed knowledge in everyone; but for Confucius, although a rare few may be born with knowledge, most of the time knowledge is acquired, and it is the acquisition of knowledge he considered most important. Confucius is concerned with knowledge derived from experience through the process of learning and thinking. However, for Mencius, we are born with some kind of knowledge as well as the potential for more knowledge. Although more narrowly concerned about morality instead of reality in general, the different views of *zhi* in the *Analects* and the *Mencius* find an analogy in the empiricist-rationalist debate in western philosophy. The empiricists, such as Locke and Hume argued that “the only way something can be known to be real is via experience.”¹⁰ As empiricists deny the possibility of innate knowledge, experience (including learning) becomes the only path to knowledge and wisdom. The rationalists, such as Descartes and Kant, argued that “an important part of what we can know to be real can be known to be real independently of experience.”¹¹ At least some knowledge is innate, and such innate knowledge is what makes possible knowledge known by other means. Intuition, they argue, and not experience is the source of knowledge. One might say that Confucius is more of an empiricist with regard to *zhi* although he does not reject the rationalist position completely, while

⁹ *Mencius*, 7A15.

¹⁰ Martijn Blaauw and Duncan Pritchard, *Epistemology A-Z*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.123.

Mencius is more of a rationalist. Xunzi is closer to Confucius' empiricist tendency and takes it even further.

For Xunzi the acquisition of knowledge through learning is more crucial than it is in Confucius and Mencius. He had a whole chapter titled "Exhorting Learning." Learning is an important stage in or a method of becoming wise. He wrote:

I once spent a whole day in thought, but it was not so valuable as a moment in study. I once stood on my tiptoes to look out into the distance, but it was not so effective as climbing up to a high place for a broader vista. A man who borrows a horse and carriage does not improve his feet, but he can extend his travels 1,000 *li*. A man who borrows a boat and paddles does not gain any new ability in water, but he can cut across rivers and seas. The gentleman by birth is not different from other men; he is just good at "borrowing" the use of external things.¹²

Since our own innate abilities are rather limited, we should learn from others in order to attain our goal. This is more effective than depending solely on our own ability. Learning is so important that it should continue throughout one's life and stop only with death.¹³

Why did Xunzi emphasize learning? The reason may be that Xunzi did not seem to have believed that there are some people who could be born with knowledge. In fact, people are only born with the same capability for learning.¹⁴ Xunzi's view departed from that of Mencius who believed that all people have the sprouts of knowledge and innate knowledge (*liangzhi*).

¹² *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 1.3.

¹³ *Xunzi*, vol.1, 1.8.

¹⁴ *Xunzi*, vol.1, 1.3.

Although Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi all advocated learning, they held different views on the content of learning. According to the *Analects*,

The Master instructs under four heads: culture (*wen*), moral conduct (*xing*), doing one's best (*zhong*) and being trustworthy in what one says (*xin*).¹⁵

Here, culture (*wen*), is believed to have included literature, rituals, music and customs. For Confucius, *wen* refers principally to the traditions of Zhou dynasty.

The Zhou surveys the two preceding dynasties. How resplendent is the culture!

My choice is with the Zhou.¹⁶

From the point of view of Confucius, the traditions of Zhou are a model of an ideal society. Knowledge that should be learned and transmitted included a responsibility beyond the cognition of objects in the world. It was a process of becoming aware of the precious cultural legacy, preserving it and transmitting it. Confucius was not much concerned with the natural world; on the contrary, he concentrated much more on human cultures and traditions. To cherish the cultural traditions of Zhou, follow them and transmit them to later generations became Confucius' focus. The core lesson of Zhou traditions lies in the *li* of Zhou dynasty,¹⁷ which could be traced back to the "Golden Age" of Western Zhou period. Confucius advocated Zhou *li* as the most important content for learning.

Li, in its original form, is a kind of religious form guiding primitive men in their ritual sacrifices to spirits and deities. Magic, fairy tales, and various ritual performances constituted *li*. Such *li* were neither political nor moral; it was only a

¹⁵ *The Analects*, 7.25.

¹⁶ *The Analects*, 3.14.

¹⁷ Refer to *The Analects*, 2.23.

form of religious practice or belief. By the time of Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, *li* has evolved into something that was of a political and moral nature. For example, during the Shang Dynasty, *li* was a tool securing political order and military victory. During Zhou, *li* further evolved into a ritual that exemplified the moral authority of the reigning political authority.¹⁸ In Confucius, *li* is an important tool for self-cultivation as well as maintaining a good socio-political order. Confucius said,

The ruler should employ the services of his subjects in accordance with *li*. A subject should serve his ruler by doing his best.¹⁹

Here, *li* is like the rules defining different political roles of the ruler and subject in the context of court. For Confucius, not only the court, but also a state needs to be governed by *li*. Confucius said,

If a man is able to govern a state by observing *li* and showing deference, what difficulties will he have in public life? If he is unable to govern a state by observing *li* and showing deference, what good are *li* to him?²⁰

Aside from the political arena, *li* is also applied in the context of family. Confucius said,

When your parents are alive, comply with *li* in serving them; when they die, comply with *li* in burying them; comply with *li* in sacrificing to them.²¹

Besides political and social functions, *li* also had important moral functions. Confucius said,

¹⁸ Wang Guowei 王國維, *Yin Zhou zhi du lun* 殷周制度論, vol.1 (Hebei: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), p. 302.

¹⁹ *The Analects*, 3.19.

²⁰ *The Analects*, 4.13.

²¹ *The Analects*, 2.5.

Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with the rites, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves.²²

For Confucius, *li* could not only keep people in line politically, but also transform them to be moral. In Confucius' time, society lapsed into chaos because "rituals perished and music was destroyed" (*libeng yuehuai* 禮崩樂壞). As Confucius would argue, a good social order exists only when everyone acts virtuously to fulfill the responsibilities of their social roles or positions. Doing this presupposes familiarity with the norms of *li*, the compliance of which cultivates virtue in persons. This is the reason why Confucius recommended the learning of *li*.²³

Of course one does not merely learn *li* even though it is one of the most important things one should learn. Other things worth learning include literature, which Confucius speaks of in the *Analects*:

Unless you study the *Odes* you will be ill-equipped to speak.²⁴

The *Odes* is the oldest collection of Chinese poetry, which could be traced back to the Western Zhou dynasty. It includes more than three hundred songs, odes and hymns representative of the ancient Chinese literatures. Confucius regarded the *Odes* as necessary learning for enhancing one's speaking ability.

Besides the repository of traditional culture, there is also the "physical" training curriculum.

From the "six arts" established by Confucius as the curriculum for his followers—ritual, music, archery, charioteering, writing and calculations—it is

²² *The Analects*, 2.3.

²³ In a dialogue with his son—Kong Li, Confucius showed his concern about learning *li*. See *The Analects*, 16.13.

²⁴ *The Analects*, 16.13.

clear that learning was a project requiring a commitment on the part of the entire person, and that written documents were only one, albeit important, element in the scholar's career.²⁵

Such physical training and practicing what one learnt is what he called "conduct" (*xing* 行). The other two elements of learning are *zhong* and *xin*, pertaining to moral relationships among people. Confucius tried to persuade the people to serve the lord loyally and be trustworthy friends.

Thus, Confucius prescribed a curriculum that would lead to an orderly society and virtuous people. However, in Mencius this becomes unbalanced and incomplete.

Xiang (庠), *xu* (序), *xue* (學) and *xiao* (校) were set up for the purpose of education. ... They all serve to make the people understand *human relationships*.

When it is clear that those in authority understand human relationships, the people will be affectionate.²⁶

So, his school was established to teach the understanding of "human relationships."

This gave the sage King further cause for concern, and so he appointed Qi as the Minister of Education whose duty was to teach the people *human relationships*: love (*qin* 親) between father and son, duty (*yi* 義) between ruler and subject, distinction (*bie* 別) between husband and wife, precedence (*xu* 序) of the old over the young, and faith (*xin* 信) between friends.²⁷

For Mencius, one needs to grasp such moral relationships in different circumstances

²⁵ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 45.

²⁶ *Mencius*, 3A3.

²⁷ *Mencius*, 3A4.

rather than *li* which was emphasized by Confucius as the core of learning. This led to a weakening of Confucianism and opened it up to various objections. The time Mencius lived in was the mid-late Warring States period, a period of political chaos and military struggles. Securing good socio-political order was urgent then. So *li* worked as a socio-political tool, and played a far more important role than it did in Confucius' time. Mencius' diminishing of *li* in learning made the realization of Confucian political ideal even more difficult.

Mencius only believed that, once the people cultivated themselves to be moral through learning moral relationships and extended such benevolence to other people, the society would become orderly and people would live happily.²⁸ In fact, reliance on the understanding of moral relationships seems too idealistic a program for securing an orderly socio-political order and an ideal society. Even if the people could be cultivated morally, there was no guarantee that an orderly society would emerge. An orderly society needs more, viz., coordination and organization. This is where *li* enters the picture.

Like Confucius, Xunzi also regarded the classical texts as an important source of knowledge.

Learning—where should it begin and where should it end! I say: Its proper method is to start with the recitation of the Classics and conclude with the reading of the *Rituals*. Its real purpose is first to create a scholar and in the end to create a sage.²⁹

²⁸ Refer to *Mencius*, 1A7.

²⁹ *Xunzi*, vol.1, 1.8.

Although we could not be absolutely certain what the Classics (*jing*) at that time were, they are supposed to include the *Documents*, the *Odes*, the *Music* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* in Xunzi's time. Despite having different contents (the Classics pertains to the history, literature, music and politics in ancient times while the *Rituals* refers to the ritual performance and rules), they all lead to the Way of the sage kings.

The Way of the Hundred Kings is at one with the sage. Hence, the Way expressed in the *Odes*, *Documents*, *Rituals*, and *Music* returns to this oneness.

The *Odes* express the sage's intentions; the *Documents* his official business; the *Rituals* his conduct; the *Music* his harmoniousness, (and the *Annals* his esoteric meaning).³⁰

So, the Classics are necessary for learning to be a Confucian scholar and even a sage.

The emphasis on *Rituals* places Xunzi closer to Confucius.

Besides the classical texts, the instructions from teachers, stemming from their practice and experiential grasp of reality, are also an important source of learning.

Xunzi said,

The *Rituals* and *Music* present models but do not offer explanation; the *Odes* and *Documents* present matters of antiquity but are not always apposite; the *Annals* are laconic, and their import is not quickly grasped. It is just on these occasions that the man of learning repeats the explanations of the gentleman. Thus, he is honored for his comprehensive and catholic acquaintance with the affairs of the world. Therefore it is said: "In learning, no method is of more advantage than to

³⁰ Xunzi, vol. 2, 8.7.

be near a man of learning.”³¹

Xunzi argued that these classics were unclear so they need the gentleman’s insights and commentary. Such a person knows better what these classics indicated. He can apply these classics according to circumstances and contexts. Hence one needs to learn from the gentleman besides reading the classics. He is a moral exemplar who is more familiar with worldly application. One can be considered knowledgeable only with the grasp of the classics and its application. So what might the applied knowledge be? In *Jie Bi*, Xunzi said,

Thus, true learning inherently has a terminus to study. Where is its terminus? I say that it is at complete sufficiency. Who has such sufficiency? I say it is the sage king. Sageliness consists in a comprehensive grasp of the natural relationships between men. True kingship consists in a comprehensive grasp of the regulations for government. A comprehensive grasp of both is sufficient to become the ridgepole for the world. Hence, the student should take the sage king as his teacher and the regulations of the sage king as the model.³²

It is from the sage king that we learn “sageliness” and “true kingship.” “Sageliness” includes the moral relationships among the people; and “true kingship” includes the regulations for a government. Such regulations include the guidance that *li* offers for politics. Thus, Xunzi thought moral learning and political learning equally important. However, it was not always true for Xunzi that they went hand in hand. Indeed, moral learning does not automatically lead to a good government and good social order. In

³¹ *Xunzi*, vol.1, 1.10.

³² *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 21.9.

this case, Xunzi argued for the combination of moral learning and political learning.

What makes a person a lord? I reply: To employ *li* in dividing the largess and to be equitable in every case and unbiased. What makes a person a minister? I reply: To wait on the lord according to *li* and to be loyal, obedient, and not lazy. What makes a person a father? I reply: To be generous, kind and to possess *li*.³³

Compared with Mencius, Xunzi argued that the content for learning should not only include the moral relationships among people, but also the political and social regulations guided by *li*. It is Xunzi who revived Confucius' teachings in his time. For Confucius, *wen*, *xing*, *zhong* and *xin*, that is, political and moral learning should be combined together to produce some kind of teaching adaptable to the times and leading to the realization of Confucian ideals. Xunzi followed Confucius' teachings in this aspect and incorporated *li* (political learning) with *zhong* and *xin* (moral learning) in every circumstance of a person's conduct (*xing*). By emphasizing the importance of political learning, Xunzi saved Confucianism from lapsing into a situation in which the realization of Confucian political ideal is almost impossible, which has been the case with Mencius' teachings. Thus, we could say that Xunzi's teaching of learning is a correction of Mencian bias and returns to Confucius.

In Xunzi's view, aside from *li*, *fa* should also be included in the content for learning. In the *Xunzi*, *fa* often means "the law", especially when it appears in the term *lifa* 禮法.

When everything within and without the court is like this, nothing is left

³³ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 12.3.

unbalanced and unadjusted, and nothing is without order and management. All these matters have been the same for all the Hundred Kings, and are the primary social divisions of ritual (*li*) and the law (*fa*).³⁴

Xunzi used *fa* with *li* to maintain the normative social distinctions and political order.³⁵ Xunzi said,

Lord and minister, superior and inferior, noble and base, old and young, down to commoners—all should exalt this as the standard of rectitude. Only in this way will all examine themselves to ensure that they devote their attention to the tasks of their social class. In this all the Hundred Kings have been identical, and this principle forms the pivot and axis of all ritual principles (*li*) and the law (*fa*).³⁶

Thus, Xunzi believed that “one who is in the process of learning is one who learns of ritual principles (*li*) and the law (*fa*).”³⁷ Such a broad learning in Xunzi reminds us the similar emphasis on broad learning in Confucius. For both of them, only if learning is not narrow in scope, could people have an open mind and only then would they be ready to learn “extraordinary” things that could be more adaptable to their times and so more effectively achieve and realize Confucian ideals.

Although all people should learn *li* and *fa* for Xunzi, not all could understand the meanings of *li* and *fa*.

Although the common men follow *li*, they do not understand (*zhi*) it; while the

³⁴ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 11.5b.

³⁵ Knoblock does not always translate *lifa* consistently. Sometimes he translates *fa* as the “model.” Whereas I think that always translating *fa* as “law” actually gives a more consistent understanding of the text. See the example, *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 2.10 and 2.11.

³⁶ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 11.9a.

³⁷ *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 2.10 and 2.11.

sage not only follows *li*, but also understands it.³⁸

Nevertheless, even if people do not understand the meanings of *li* and *fa*, they could still learn and follow them and at least behave well. Xunzi said,

When knowledgeable (*zhi*), he understands the interconnections between phenomena and can assign them to their proper logical category. When ignorant, he is honest and diligent and can follow *fa*.³⁹

Through being instructed by the teachers and moral authorities would they behave according to *li* and *fa*, the result of which is an orderly society. This is true even if they do not understand the meanings of *li* and *fa*. In this way, the authoritative force of the teacher and moral exemplar is greater in Xunzi's teachings.

In fact, in Xunzi's view, the teacher and moral exemplar are authorities, whose teachings should be exalted to the highest and followed step by step.

Having a teacher and the model is man's greatest treasure, and lacking a teacher and the model his greatest calamity.⁴⁰

For Xunzi, it is the teacher and moral exemplar who can apply the texts in realistic contexts. For this reason, Xunzi exalted the teacher's authority. As Herrlee G. Creel commented, "it is Hsun Tzu [Xunzi] who exalted him [the teacher] to the skies."⁴¹

In contrast, Confucius did not exalt the teacher to such a high position. He said,

Even when walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them. The good points of the one I copy; the bad points of the other I

³⁸ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 30.1. Translation mine.

³⁹ *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 3.6.

⁴⁰ *Xunzi*, vol.2, 8.11.

⁴¹ Herrlee G. Creel, *Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao Tse-tung* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 124.

correct in myself.⁴²

This passage appears to conflict with the suggestion that the teacher is infallible and beyond reproach. Because any one could become a teacher, there was no way to validate the teacher's claims, and if there was to be any form of validation, the students had to do it. For this reason Confucius insisted that the student had to apply discerning discrimination when he hears the teacher, who is merely a support and not the source of truth. The teacher's authority in Confucius is played down.

Mencius also emphasized the importance of the teacher in encouraging the students to acquire moral knowledge. Equally, Mencius highlighted the need for students to be self-motivated and it is the students rather than the teachers who are the primary cause of learning, as we can see in 7A3 and other chapters. Mencius argued that the teacher should instruct the students to seek the knowledge themselves.⁴³

Thus, both Confucius and Mencius emphasized the students' active role in the process of learning. Confucius believed some people are born with knowledge. Mencius thought people are naturally good, so the students could become moral by learning independently. However, such ideas may be contradicted by counter-examples. In reality, independent learning might not be possible or common. In fact, even if the teacher helps the student learn, the student might not enjoy learning, nor apply what they learn. Both Confucius and Mencius could not effectively persuade people to acquire moral knowledge and become moral. In this

⁴² *The Analects*, 7.22.

⁴³ See *Mencius*, 7B5 and 7A41. In the first section, Mencius compared the teacher to the carpenter and argued that the function of teacher is to teach the student rules of learning, while whether the student could become learned or skillful was totally dependent on himself. In the second section, Mencius compared the teacher to the wise archer who instructed the people how to shoot. The archer should prompt his students to shoot by themselves instead of shooting for them.

case, Xunzi strengthened the authority of teachers and moral exemplars and made them more awe inspiring and compelling so people could follow their example, obey concrete *li* and *fa* and become moral in the end. As Tu Wei-ming observes,

The Confucian project, as shaped by Hsun Tzu [Xunzi], defines learning as socialization. Authorities such as ancient sages and worthies, the classical tradition, conventional norms, teachers, governmental rules and regulations, and political officers are all important resources for transforming human nature. A cultured person is by definition a fully socialized participant of the human community who has successfully sublimated his or her instinctual demands to further the public good.⁴⁴

In Xunzi's view, people might not like to learn and follow these prescriptive political regulations. However, the awe inspiring and compelling teacher could effectively urge the people to follow his instructions. By emulating him, they may be willing to learn. It is possible that later in time, they might grasp the benefits that such political regulations brought about, and then they would become more willing to learn and follow them. So, society becomes orderly in the end. Thus, Xunzi provided a realistic solution on top of education to solve Confucius' and Mencius' problem.

Although Xunzi argued that people should try to learn and understand *li* and *fa*, he did not regard *li* and *fa* as something produced by the common people. A common person may only need to learn, understand and follow *li* and *fa* whereas the task of producing *li* and *fa* should be taken up by the sage. So, how could the sage produce *li*

⁴⁴ Tu Wei-ming, "Confucianism," in Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Our Religions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), p. 160.

and *fa*? For Xunzi, it requires the sage to have an extraordinary *si*.

Si (思)

Si is usually translated as “thinking.” However, in English, thinking is often contrasted with feelings or emotions, which makes this translation to “thinking” problematic because *si* also often means “pay attention to,” “be concerned about,” “desire to,” or “be thinking of in the sense of missing or yearning for someone or something.”

Confucius emphasized the integration of learning and *si* and regarded the two parts as indispensable conditions of becoming knowledgeable.

If one learns from others but does not think (*si*), one will be bewildered. If, on the other hand, one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be in peril.⁴⁵

Here, *si* seems to refer to the consideration of ideas we have learnt from another. In this case, *si* might be translated as “thinking.” For Confucius, if people learn but do not think, they will be lost in book learning or merely be imitating others. On the other hand, if people merely think but do not learn, there is a worse outcome: such ungrounded and empty thinking either diverts one’s attention from real problems or produces impractical solutions which could be dangerous. Thus, in Confucius’ view, learning and thinking should be combined. Neglecting either one would result in ignorance.

Si is related to learning not only in terms of thinking over what is learned. Ames

⁴⁵ *The Analects*, 2.15.

goes further to regard *si* for Confucius is an important way of adapting what is learned to one's own circumstances. He argues,

One must be creative to take full advantage of appropriated culture, both in adapting it for his own place and time, and in using it as a structure through which to realize his own possibilities. He must labor assiduously to acquire the culture transmitted from ancient times but must also be able to take it a step further in maximizing the possibilities of the prevailing conditions...⁴⁶

In this case, *si* is the adaptation of one's learning according to the present situation. In the view of Confucius, the *li* curriculum, which had included many religious rituals, should include more political and moral considerations during the Spring and Autumn period. *Li* should not only be regarded as a religious performance, but also a kind of political tool for securing a good socio-political order and moral tool for achieving the status of a gentleman. Thus, through the effort of *si*, one's learning of *li* is expanded to the political and moral area, which would lead to political stability and moral cultivation of the citizenry. Confucius said,

There are nine things the gentleman turns his thought to (*jiusi* 九思): to seeing clearly when he uses his eyes, to hearing acutely when he uses his ears, to looking cordial when it comes to his countenance, to appearing respectful when it comes to his demeanour, to being conscientious when he speaks, to being reverent when he performs his duties, to seeking advice when he is in doubt, to the consequences when he is enraged, and to what is right at the sight of gain.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, p. 48.

⁴⁷ *The Analects*, 16.10.

Here, *si* might be interpreted as “desiring to do something,” “attending to,” or “focusing on.” In this passage, Confucius shows us the “best practices” that one should employ in different political and moral circumstances. Through the process of *si*, a person could adapt *li* and other moral ideas to realistic scenarios and the result is an orderly society as well as one’s becoming a gentleman.

Among the diverse usages of *si*, we could see that Confucius hoped people could incorporate *si* with learning so as to achieve a full understanding of what they have learned, adapt what is learned to the current situation, and desire to be moral when they are situated in different circumstances.

In the *Mencius*, *si* also means “thinking.” For Mencius, *si* is the function of the heart/mind.

The organ of the heart/mind (*xin*) can *si*. But it will find the answer only if it does *si*; otherwise, it will not find the answer.⁴⁸

Since Mencius claimed that human beings are born with moral sprouts that would perish without elaboration and development, *si* plays an important role in elaborating and developing the moral sprouts into their fully-grown status. Mencius argued,

Ren, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi* are not welded on to me from the outside; they are in me originally. In fact, it is just that we do not think of (*si*) them. That is why it is said, “Seek and you will find it; let go and you will lose it.”⁴⁹

For Mencius, there is the capacity for *si* and there are sprouts of morality in all persons. Therefore is it within everyone’s power to discover the principles that would

⁴⁸ *Mencius*, 6A15.

⁴⁹ *Mencius*, 6A6.

guide them morally. It is through *si* that one grows the sprouts of morality, which results in the ordering of society. However, even *cirang zhixin*'s moral development is not sufficient for bringing about an orderly society. For Mencius, even if *cirang zhixin* is mature and manifests *li*, it is not yet the normative socio-political order a chaotic society urgently needs. Mencius only emphasized the moral aspect of Confucius' teachings. He considered *si* only in relation to moral thinking and not political deliberation. In this case, Mencius' teaching of *si* could not supply a coherent and practicable system for guiding the achievement of the Confucian political ideal, which is a good and orderly society.

Mencius' moral psychology is too naive for achieving anything substantial. His theory could not survive the objection that people would not voluntarily develop their moralities, especially when their lives were at stake.⁵⁰ Even if that objection were overcome, it does not mean that an orderly human society and a good government could be established. An orderly society needs more regulative institutions and systems to defend people's benefits and curb crimes, all of which could not be brought about by moral development alone.

In the context of Xunzi, *si* has multiple meanings, including "pondering" and "missing or longing for." Xunzi elaborated on Confucius' argument that learning and thinking should complement each other.

The gentleman, knowing well that learning that is incomplete and impure does not deserve to be called fine, recites and enumerates his studies that he will be

⁵⁰ See *Mencius*, 6A10.

familiar with them, thinks over (*si*) them and searches into them that he will fully penetrate their meaning.....⁵¹

In such contexts, *si* could be understood as pondering over and understanding fully what we have learnt. In Xunzi's view, we should think and comprehend fully the implications of *li*.

Now, man assuredly does not possess *li* and precepts of morality as part of his inborn nature; therefore he must study very hard when seeking them. Inborn nature is unaware of them; therefore in his thoughts and ideas he has to think and understand *li* and precepts of morality.⁵²

Aside from *li*, Xunzi argued for pondering over *fa*, the law, and fully understanding its meanings. Xunzi said,

One who, not understanding the meanings of the laws (*fa*), attempts to rectify the norms contained therein, however broad his view, is bound to produce anarchy in what he superintends.⁵³

In the *Xunzi*, *si* is also used to indicate a kind of emotion that is missing or longing for someone.⁵⁴ Besides these, there is another more important implication of *si* as it is applied in the *Xunzi*. Xunzi said,

Those who keep to the mean provided by *li* (ritual) and are able to ponder (*si*) and meditate on it are said to be able to *lǚ*.⁵⁵

Here, it seems that Xunzi related *si* to deliberation (*lǚ*), which is a further

⁵¹ *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 1.14, vol.3, 19.2d, 21.5d, 21.7d.

⁵² *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 23.2b.

⁵³ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 12.1.

⁵⁴ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 19.4c.

⁵⁵ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 19.2d.

development of *si*. For Xunzi, deliberation means not only understanding fully the meaning of *li*, but also considering the possible consequences of one's actions.

When a man sees something desirable, he must *lǔ* (reflect on) the fact that with time it could come to involve what is detestable. When he sees something that is beneficial, he should reflect that sooner or later it, too, could come to involve harm. Only after weighing the total of the one against that of the other and maturely calculating should he determine the relative merits of choosing or refusing his desires and aversions.⁵⁶

Thus, *si* or *lǔ* had an important implication. That is, we should weigh (*quan*) the possible consequences and factors before taking action. This means that the action taken by a person does not merely influence what is present, but also the future.⁵⁷ Further, what comes under consideration includes long-term consequences. As A. S. Cua points out,

Deliberation, at its inception, addresses a current perplexity. Its primary concern is the immediate consequence of pursuing concurrent desires. But the present situation, as one posing a problem of choice, may well be an exigent situation, i.e., a novel circumstance in which past experience does not provide sufficient guidance. Also, it may be one in which the decision to be rendered is a plan of action. In this case, the agent cannot be content with mere examination of the immediate consequences of the contemplated actions but must attend to distant

⁵⁶ Xunzi, vol.1, 3.13.

⁵⁷ Xunzi's insight on this point develops the *Analecs*, 15.12, in which, Confucius said, "He who gives no thought to difficulties in the future is sure to be beset by worries much closer at hand (*renwu yuanlǔ, biyou jinyou* 人無遠慮, 必有近憂)."

consequences—in Xunzi’s words, “consider the long view of things and think of their consequences,” (*chānglǚ guhòu*).⁵⁸

In Xunzi’s view, a person should consider the current reality and long-term consequences before he carries out a strategy. That is to say, when a ruler considers the need of the late Warring States period and the distant consequences of carrying out *li*, he could adapt *li* to be an important tool for maintaining a good socio-political order and realizing the Confucian political ideal.

For Xunzi, only the sage could accumulate his *si* and learning to produce *li* and *fa*. Through his learning, the sage would have within himself the basic stuff from which he grasps *li*. When he employs his *si*, he could fully understand its meanings and adapt it to the current circumstances. Xunzi said,

The sage accumulates his thoughts (*si*) and ideas. He masters through practice the skills of his acquired nature and the principles involved therein in order to produce ritual principles (*li*) and moral duty and to develop laws (*fa*) and standards.⁵⁹

In Xunzi’s view, when a sage lives in a time of chaos, he should employ his realistic *si* and change *li* to be more political and prescriptive and establish *fa* to maintain a good socio-political order. Mencius’ model of achieving good socio-political order through moral cultivation is inappropriately idealistic for the time of late Warring States period. What the time needs is an effective political system to maintain a good socio-political order. Thus, *li* in association with *fa* become urgently

⁵⁸ A.S. Cua, “Xunzi,” in A.S. Cua (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 826.

⁵⁹ *Xunzi*, vol.3, 23.2a.

needed in achieving such political purpose. For Xunzi, when a sage's learning and *si* were combined together and increasingly accumulated, *li* and *fa*, which could be more adaptable to the time of late Warring States period, could be crystallized.

Although Xunzi stressed the political importance of *li*, he did not neglect *li*'s moral function. In fact, for Xunzi, the political *li* could also produce moral qualities. Xunzi said,

It is through ritual (*li*) that the individual is rectified...When what ritual mandates, you make so in your conduct, then your emotions will find peace in ritual...When your emotions find peace in ritual and your knowing is like that of your teacher, then you will become a sage.⁶⁰

In this sense, to learn the knowledge of *li* and act according to the standards of *li* will help a person to realize the moral goal of *ren*. Thus, through his teachings of *si*, Xunzi believed he had found an effective tool of achieving a good socio-political order and moral person, which are the fundamental ground of Confucian political and moral ideals.

Nevertheless, even if Xunzi stressed the importance of *si*, which ponders what one has learnt and applies these in the moral and political reality in the time of the late Warring States period, it did not mean that he really thought everyone could attain such a complete understanding or bridge the gap between theory and reality. In fact, Xunzi recognized the different levels of moral and political awareness. For Xunzi, only those who could not only adhere to *li* but also think and have a fondness for *li*

⁶⁰ *Xunzi*, vol.1, 2.11.

could be called a sage. However, for a common person, even if he could adhere to *li* steadfastly, he might not be able to fully understand it, not to mention love it.⁶¹ Thus, *si* brings the moral development to a higher stage that not everyone will achieve, or at least not at the same pace. We must start from the bottom. It is in this sense that Xunzi argued for learning from the teachers and moral exemplars.

Even if Xunzi regarded the sage as the only one who could understand the true meaning of *li* and consider the applicability of what is learnt in current time, while the common people might not be able to produce *li* and *fa* by themselves, the role of *si*, needless to say, is very important in acquiring moral knowledge and providing new models (*li* and *fa*) for political education. So, how could one improve one's *si*? To answer this question, Xunzi needed to give a more detailed account of the functioning of *si*, and he did that by borrowing from the Daoists' more developed philosophical psychology, probably because he found the Mencian account inadequate.

***Xu* (Emptiness), *Yi* (Unity) and *Jing* (Stillness) in the Heart/Mind (*Xin* 心)**

How could a person perform *si*? This is the function of the *xin* (心), which could be translated as “heart,” “mind,” or “heart/mind.” Confucius, unfortunately, had little to say about *xin* and later Confucians could not depend on him for an adequate philosophical psychology. In the view of Mencius, the moral sprouts—germ of *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi*—belong to *xin*. Mencius said,

The *xin* of compassion is the germ of *ren*; the *xin* of shame, of *yi*; the *xin* of

⁶¹ Refer to *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 19.2d.

courtesy and modesty, of observance of *li*; the *xin* of right and wrong, of *zhi*.

Man has these four sprouts just as he has four limbs.⁶²

In 6A15, Mencius also said that the function of *xin* is to *si*. As we have discussed in the section of *si*, Mencian *si* facilitates the development of moral sprouts in the *xin*. However such innate elaboration or development is not a very plausible account, and moreover pays no attention to the need to adapt Confucian ideals to the times. For Xunzi, however, *si* should adapt what is learnt to the current circumstance. To achieve such *si*, Xunzi argued that *xin* should be kept in a status of *xu* (emptiness), *yi* (unity) and *jing* (stillness). Only if such status could be attained, could *xin* establish a kind of *si* that could adapt what is learnt to the current circumstance and realize the Confucian way. Xunzi said,

What do men use to know the Way? I say that it is in the *xin*. How does the *xin* know? I say by its emptiness, unity, and stillness. The *xin* never stops storing; nonetheless it possesses what is called emptiness. The *xin* never lacks duality; nonetheless it possesses what is called unity. The *xin* never stops moving; nonetheless it possesses what is called stillness.⁶³

Some scholars have noticed the notion of “emptiness, unity and stillness” in Xunzi was due to the influence of Zhuangzi.⁶⁴ If we compare the *Xunzi* with the text of *Zhuangzi*, there are indeed many striking similarities that support the claim that Xunzi was probably influenced by Zhuangzi in employing “emptiness, unity, and stillness”

⁶² Mencius, 2A6.

⁶³ Xunzi, vol. 3, 21.5d.

⁶⁴ Lee H. Yearley, “Hsun Tzu on the Mind: His Attempted Synthesis of Confucianism and Daoism,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 39 (1980), pp. 465-480; Aaron Stalnaker, “Aspects of Xunzi’s Engagement with Early Daoism,” *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 53, no.1 (2003), pp. 87-129; Janghee Lee, *Xunzi and Early Chinese Naturalism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005).

to enhance the means for knowing the Way.

Xunzi and Zhuangzi shared similar views about some problems of their respective times. In Xunzi's and Zhuangzi's times, various academic schools argued for their own views and against other schools' views. Under such situation, Xunzi said,

Each of these methods encompasses but a single corner of the Way. But the Way itself is constant in its form yet completely changeable. One corner is an insufficient basis for drawing conclusions about it. Men with knowledge of some small point gaze upon their single corner of the Way and are never able to recognize that it is only a small corner. Thus, they consider it sufficient and proceed to embroider upon it. Within they bring disorder upon themselves; without they cause others to be deluded...Such are the misfortunes of blindness and being closed to the truth.⁶⁵

So, Xunzi regarded the prejudices existing in various schools as the root reason for their radical debates. Interestingly enough, Zhuangzi also held such view:

But the world is in great disorder, the worthies and sages lack clarity of vision, and the Way and its Virtue are no longer One. So the world too often seizes upon one of its aspects, examines it, and pronounces it good. But it is like the case of the ear, the eye, the nose, and the mouth; each has its own kind of understanding, but their functions are not interchangeable. In the same way, the various skills of the hundred schools all have their strong points, and at time each may be of use.

⁶⁵ *Xunzi*, vol.3, 21.4.

But none is wholly sufficient, none is universal.⁶⁶

For Zhuangzi, only if one's knowledge becomes broad enough and not any longer narrow, could it be regarded as the "Great Knowledge (*dazhi* 大知)." He said,

Great Knowledge (*dazhi* 大知) is broad and unhurried; Little Knowledge (*xiaozhi* 小知) is cramped and busy.⁶⁷

Thus, for both Xunzi and Zhuangzi, the views of any individual school are too narrow to be regarded as the comprehensive understanding of the world. Both of them believed that these parochial views, although having their own strong points, are only prejudices and not sufficient for our understanding of the world. In this case, Xunzi was quite similar with Zhuangzi in reviewing the hundred schools, although Zhuangzi was also criticized by him, and as a Confucian he would also fall under Zhuangzi's disapproval.⁶⁸

Since the views of any individual school are too narrow, how could we achieve a comprehensive understanding of the world? For Xunzi, this requires a person to accommodate the myriad things and views:

The sage knows the flaws of the mind's operation and perceives the misfortunes of blindness and being closed to the truth. This is why he is without desires and aversions, without beginnings and ends of things, without the remote or near, without broadness or shallowness, without antiquity or modernity. He *lays out all the myriad things and causes himself to exactly match how each settles on the*

⁶⁶ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 33, p. 364.

⁶⁷ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 2, p. 37.

⁶⁸ See *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 21.4. Zhuangzi was criticized by Xunzi as "blinded by *tian* and was insensible to men."

*suspended balance (jianchen wanwu er zhong xuanheng 兼陳萬物而中懸衡).*⁶⁹

In the text of *Zhuangzi*, we also find a strikingly similar passage describing how to avoid prejudices and achieve a comprehensive understanding of the world.

Be broad and expansive like the endlessness of the four directions—they have nothing which bounds or hedges them. *Embrace the ten thousand things universally (jianhuai wanwu 兼懷萬物)*—how could there be one you should give special support to? This is called being without bent.⁷⁰

For *Zhuangzi*, it seems that we should not only lay out and accommodate the myriad things and views, but also treat them equally without preferences. Thus, for *Xunzi* and *Zhuangzi*, we should accommodate the myriad things and views instead of fixating on only one thing or view of the world. For *Xunzi*, a person should not be obsessed by the views of any one school or thinker, in which he could not see the whole picture; in fact, he should try his best to combine all useful aspects of various schools to formulate a holistic view of the truth. For *Zhuangzi*, we should not be obsessed by our previous knowledge or prejudice but should treat all knowledge or even opposite views as equally important for knowing the whole truth. In *Zhuangzi*'s words, this is the process of “by means of clarity (*yiming* 以明).” In discussing the dispute between Confucians and the Mohists, *Zhuangzi* said,

When the Way relies on little accomplishments and words rely on vain show, then we have the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and the Mohists. What one calls right the other calls wrong; what one calls wrong the other calls right. But if

⁶⁹ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 21.5a. Italics mine.

⁷⁰ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 17, pp. 181-182. Italics mine.

we want to right their wrongs and wrong their rights, then the best thing to use is clarity (*yiming* 以明).⁷¹

In Guo Xiang's interpretation, the term "*yiming*" implies that we should illuminate our own views by accommodating and acknowledging other views. Hu Shih also argues that this term means that one side should consider the other side's views to illuminate what he does not know; the other side should also consider this side's view to illuminate what he does not know. Thus, there will be no such distinctions and disputes between different sides.⁷² Zhuangzi is trying to tell us that we should treat the different schools equally. In this respect, it is quite possible that Xunzi was influenced by Zhuangzi again in his concern about prejudice, or at least, they shared something in common in their views on this issue.

Both Xunzi and Zhuangzi argued that we should accommodate the myriad things and various views to avoid prejudices, but how could a person accomplish this? Xunzi said,

Men (*Ren* 人) from birth have awareness. Having awareness, there is memory. Memories are stored in the mind, yet the mind has the property called emptiness. Not allowing what has previously been stored to interfere with what is being received in the mind is called emptiness.⁷³

Although we have stored in our *xin* memories of the knowledge we have perceived, *xin* should not be totally preoccupied with such previous knowledge to the point of

⁷¹ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 2, p. 39.

⁷² Hu Shih 胡適, *Zhongguo zhhexueshi dagang* 中國哲學史大綱 (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1996), pp. 205-206.

⁷³ Xunzi, vol. 3, 21.5d. As some commentators (Tao Hongqing 陶鴻慶 and Wang Tianhai 王天海) observe, *ren* (men) here should be *xin* (heart/mind), considering the meaning of following paragraphs. See Wang Tianhai, *Xunzi jiaoshi* 荀子校釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), pp. 849-850.

neglecting the importance of future learning. Even if what we are going to learn is different from or contradicts what we have learnt, we should be able to entertain it without prejudice and understand it on its own terms. That is to say, regardless of how much knowledge we have stored in our *xin*, we should reserve enough room for accommodating new knowledge. Only in this way could the previous knowledge serve as the basis of our future learning. Also, only in this way would future learning add to our knowledge persistently. Thus, Xunzi employed the method of *xu* to attain the detached mind to accommodate various views in the *xin*.

Quite similarly, for Zhuangzi, the usage of *xu* is also for accommodating the myriad things and various views in the world. A dialogue in the *Zhuangzi* stresses the importance of *xu*.

[Confucius says,] “Make your will one! Don’t listen with the ears, listen with *xin*.

No, don’t listen with *xin*, but listen with *qi* (vital energy). Listening stops with the ears, *xin* stops with recognition, but *qi* is empty and waits on all things. The

Way (*dao*) gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of *xin*.⁷⁴

In Zhuangzi’s view, what has been learnt in the *xin* might hinder true realization of the Way. In this case, Zhuangzi suggested that we discard all previous knowledge in the *xin* to achieve the status of emptiness so as to accommodate all things of the Way in the *xin*. For Zhuangzi, only a sage could attain such a state of emptiness to accommodate the myriad things in the world:

His (The sage’s) single *xin* (mind) reposed, the ten thousand things

⁷⁴ Burton Watson, trans. *Chuang Tzu—Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), chap. 4, p. 54.

submit—which is to say that his *xu* (emptiness) and stillness reach throughout Heaven and earth and penetrate the ten thousand things.⁷⁵

Thus, both Xunzi and Zhuangzi used the method of *xu* to accommodate the myriad things and views in the world. Such usages of *xu* are quite similar as both aim at accommodating more views and understanding the world more comprehensively. Thus, Xunzi's purpose was quite similar to that of Zhuangzi in that they shared the same concern of avoiding the interruption of previous knowledge or prejudice and of accommodating diverse views in the process of knowing.

A difference, however, should be noticed. Xunzi's "emptiness" is not total emptiness. In other words, the previous knowledge should still be stored in the *xin* so that the further acquired knowledge could be gained in addition to previous knowledge. Xunzi said,

The *xin* never stops storing...⁷⁶

Nevertheless, for Zhuangzi, "emptiness" is total emptiness, which means, *xin* should be kept totally empty when it recognizes the things but will not store anything when the recognition stops. Zhuangzi said,

Hold on to all that you have received from Heaven but do not think you have gotten anything. Be empty, that is all. The Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror—going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing.⁷⁷

So why are Xunzi and Zhuangzi similar yet different? The reason is that, while sharing some concerns about people's narrow-minded prejudices, they used this term

⁷⁵ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 13, p. 144.

⁷⁶ Xunzi, vol. 3, 21.5d.

⁷⁷ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 7, p. 97.

for different purposes in the wider context. For Xunzi, the usage of *xu* is for cultivating *xin* into an ideal state so as to know the Way.

What do men use to know the Way? I say that it is the mind. How does the mind know? I say by its *xu* (emptiness), unity, and stillness.⁷⁸

So, for Xunzi, the usage of *xu* is for dispelling prejudices in the *xin* and knowing the Confucian way comprehensively. This is a moral epistemological purpose within the context of personal cultivation and good government.

For Zhuangzi, the usage of *xu* has a broader, more profound purpose. In the *Zhuangzi*, *xu* is often used to describe the “beginning” of the world. Zhuangzi said,

In the Great Beginning, there was nonbeing...If the nature is trained, you may return to Virtue, and Virtue at its highest peak is identical with the Beginning.

Being identical, you will be empty; being empty, you will be great.⁷⁹

For Zhuangzi, the beginning of the world is empty and the myriad things in the world are produced from this emptiness. In this case, people should train their nature to return to that beginning, that is, the absolute emptiness. Zhuangzi put forward a training method for attaining the state of *xu*:

Confucius said, “...Emptiness is the fasting of the *xin*.” Yan Hui said, “Before I heard this, I was certain that I was Hui. But now that I have heard it, there is no more Hui. Can this be called emptiness?” “That’s all there is to it,” said Confucius.⁸⁰

Thus, “the fasting of *xin*” might even require that we forget ourselves in order to

⁷⁸ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 21.5d.

⁷⁹ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 12, p. 132.

⁸⁰ Watson, *Chuang Tzu—Basic Writings*, p. 58.

know the Way. In Zhuangzi, there is another important term related to the teachings of “emptiness”. That is “sitting down and forgetting (*zuowang* 坐忘).”

I smash up my limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make myself identical with the Great Thoroughfare. This is what I mean by sitting down and forgetting everything.⁸¹

“Sitting down and forgetting” attains the state of becoming identical with the Way. Thus, for Zhuangzi, the usage of *xu* and the method for attaining *xu* are for returning human beings to the Way understood as encompassing everything: this is metaphysical and goes beyond the human way(s) and moral epistemology.

For Xunzi, to establish the Confucian way and adapt what is learnt to the current circumstance, a person must open his mind and broaden it to avoid prejudices and accommodate more views. But how could such diverse views adopted from various schools be kept coherent and formulated into a set of systematic knowledge? This requires *yi* (unity).

The *xin* from birth has awareness. Having awareness, there is perception of difference. Perception of difference consists in awareness of two aspects of things at the same time. Awareness of two aspects of things all at the same time entails duality; nonetheless the *xin* has the quality called *yi*. Not allowing the one thing to interfere with the other is called *yi*.⁸²

Yi in the *Xunzi* refers to *xin*’s function of maintaining coherence in knowing. This means: although we may have perceptions of different aspects among various things

⁸¹ Watson, *Chuang Tzu—Basic Writings*, p. 46.

⁸² *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 21.5d.

or in a thing simultaneously, *xin* could concentrate on one aspect while at the same time keeping all the other aspects coherent. The *xin* would not let the perception of other aspects interrupt the perception of the current aspect, while these different perceptions could be kept coherent by *xin*'s function of *yi*.

Xunzi's usage of *yi* also reminds us of the same concept in the *Zhuangzi*. "Yi" in the context of Zhuangzi has three main interpretations: (1) It means the unity among all things in the world; (2) It means the concentration of *xin*; (3) It means all things in the world are the same. Let us first consider the first interpretation.

In Zhuangzi's view, all things including humans themselves are unified. He said, Heaven and earth were born at the same time I was, and the ten thousand things are one (*yi*) with me. We have already become one, so how can I say anything?⁸³ For Zhuangzi, the destruction of one thing means the birth of other things. So, from a holistic view, nothing is destroyed or born—all things are unified into a cosmos.⁸⁴

Quite similarly, Xunzi also regarded the myriad things including humans themselves as being unified. Xunzi said,

Tian has its seasons; *Di* its resources; and Man his government. This, of course, is why it is said that they "can form a Triad."⁸⁵

Here, "Triad" seems to be a group that is comprised of heaven, earth, and humans among which, the myriad things in the world are included. In this respect, Xunzi's cosmology is similar to Zhuangzi's in that all things are unified in the cosmos.

It should be noticed that there is a difference between Xunzi's and Zhuangzi's

⁸³ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 2, p. 43.

⁸⁴ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 2, p. 41.

⁸⁵ Xunzi, vol. 3, 17.2a.

views of unification among the myriad things. For Xunzi, humans are the center of the “Triad” which comprised the myriad things. Although humans and other things are unified, humans play a dominant role in governing and utilizing other things to satisfy human needs.⁸⁶ However, for Zhuangzi, humans and other things have no distinction and it is Dao that unifies them.

For Xunzi, since humans should govern and utilize the myriad things in the world to serve themselves, they should first try to know the myriad things. People could have different views of the world and this is the reason why the different schools exist in the world. But since the myriad things are unified, the knowledge of them should also be unified instead of being separated. In this sense, the different schools’ views, which could be regarded as different aspects of the whole truth, should be combined and unified into a whole so as to realize the final truth. That is to say, the various views of different schools should be unified to formulate a holistic view of the world. Xunzi said,

The myriad things constitute one aspect of the Way, and a single thing constitutes one aspect of the myriad things. The stupid who act on the basis of one aspect of one thing, considering that therein they know the Way, are ignorant.⁸⁷

For Xunzi, since all views should be unified, we should not only focus on one particular view but should keep the different views of all things unified and coherent. Only in this way, we might be able to know the world comprehensively. For Xunzi, emptying *xin* and accepting the different views is only the first step for knowing the

⁸⁶ Refer to *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 17.2a.

⁸⁷ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 17.12.

truth. The next step is to unify these different perceptions and fit them together so as to achieve a full and good understanding.

Even if Xunzi might be influenced by Zhuangzi in respect of his use of *yi*, he departed from Zhuangzi on the final purpose in using this term. For Zhuangzi, *yi* is the unity of the world's myriad things at the beginning. So, the task for humans is to return to such original unity.

In the Great Beginning, there was nonbeing; there was no being, no name. Out of it arose *yi*; there was *yi*, but it had no form. Things got hold of it and came to life, and it was called Virtue.⁸⁸

However, for Xunzi, the usage of the term *yi* is very specific. Epistemologically, it helps us focus on something and unify different views together, and thus one acquires a comprehensive understanding of the external world. This is the difference between Xunzi and Zhuangzi in using this term.

Yi in the *Zhuangzi* also means the concentration of *xin*. In the passage about *xinzhai*, Zhuangzi argued that one's mind should be concentrated when he fasts his mind.⁸⁹ In the chapter *zhibeiyou* ("Wisdom Wanders North"), Zhuangzi said,

Straighten up your body, concentrate your vision, and the harmony of Heaven will come to you. Call in your knowledge, concentrate your thoughts, and the spirits will come to dwell with you.⁹⁰

For Zhuangzi, only if the mind and sense organs could concentrate could a person achieve a good understanding. Like Zhuangzi, Xunzi also emphasized the importance

⁸⁸ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 12, p. 131.

⁸⁹ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 4, p. 57.

⁹⁰ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 22, p. 237.

of concentration in the mind. He said,

Though the earth worm has neither the advantage of claws and teeth nor the strength of muscles and bones, it can eat dust and dirt above ground and drink from the waters of the Yellow Springs below, because its mind is concentrated on a constant end.⁹¹

For Xunzi, concentration means no distraction in the mind, which impedes knowing. Without the concentration of the mind, we could not consistently perform. For Xunzi, “yi” also means “not allowing the one thing to interfere with the other,” which not only requires us to unify all different perceptions, but also concentrates our mind on one thing when we know. Only if we could concentrate on something consistently, could we not be distracted.

Yi in the *Zhuangzi* has another important interpretation, that is, all things in the world are the same. Zhuangzi said,

If you look at them from the point of view of their differences, then there is liver and gall, Chu and Yue. But if you look at them from the point of view of their sameness, then the ten thousand things are all one (*yi*).⁹²

Thus, all different things in the world are regarded as identical at a level more significant than their apparent differences in the view of Zhuangzi.

Departing from Zhuangzi, Xunzi held a different view on this issue. In Xunzi’s view, the myriad things in the world are different and could not be regarded as identical. Xunzi said,

⁹¹ Xunzi, vol. 1, 1.6.

⁹² Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 5, p. 69.

The myriad things share the same world, but their embodied form is different.⁹³

Just as there are Heaven and Earth, so too there exists the distinction between superior and inferior.⁹⁴

For Xunzi, the myriad things including humans have their different attributes:

Fire and water possess vital breath but have no life. Plants and trees possess life, but lack awareness. Birds and beasts have awareness, but lack a sense of morality and justice. Humans possess vital breath, life, and awareness, and add to them a sense of morality and justice. It is for this reason that they are the noblest beings in the world.⁹⁵

It is in this respect that Xunzi departed from Zhuangzi's Daoist course. For Xunzi, it is because humans have moral attributes that they are significantly distinct from other things like plants, beasts, etc. It is in this sense that Xunzi regarded the Confucian way as the only right teachings for directing human life. As for the teachings of other schools, Xunzi only regarded them as the supplemental resource that might be utilized more or less to complete the Confucian way. That is to say, although the various views of different schools could be combined and unified to formulate the final truth, the most important and dominant teachings are still Confucian. It is also in this respect that Xunzi kept his Confucian status and did not lapse into Daoism.

After *xu* and *yi*, it seems that a person could have formulated the most comprehensive knowledge of the world. However, for Xunzi, there is another necessary condition for achieving this goal which is *jing* (stillness) in the *xin*. Without

⁹³ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 10.1.

⁹⁴ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 9.3.

⁹⁵ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 9.16a.

jing, *xu* and *yi* could not be completed smoothly. Xunzi said,

When the mind is asleep, it dreams. When it relaxes, it moves of its own accord.

When it is employed in a task, it plans. Thus the mind never stops moving;

nonetheless it possesses the quality called stillness. Not allowing dreams and

fantasies to bring disorder to awareness is called stillness.⁹⁶

“*Jing*” in the *Xunzi* means that we should overcome all kinds of illusions or dreams in the *xin* so as to realize the Way. Since we all have illusions or imaginations in our everyday life, such as dreams, nonsense thoughts, illusions, etc., we should not let such illusions distract our thinking. For Zhuangzi, illusions should also be dispelled so as to realize the Way. Zhuangzi said,

Wipe out the delusions of the will, undo the snares of the heart, rid yourself of the entanglements to virtue; open up the roadblocks in the Way. Eminence and wealth, recognition and authority, fame and profit—these six are the delusions of the will. Appearances and carriage, complexion and features, temperament and attitude—these six are the snares of the heart...When these four sixes no longer seethe within the breast, then you will achieve uprightness; being upright, you will be still; being still, you will be enlightened....⁹⁷

Although Zhuangzi did not object to the same thing that Xunzi did, in realizing the Way both argued that *xin* should be kept still to know the Way.

For Xunzi, *xin* should be kept still just like the still water to reflect the Way without distortion. Xunzi said,

⁹⁶ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 21.5d.

⁹⁷ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 23, p. 259.

The human mind may be compared to a pan of water. If you place the pan upright and do not stir water up, the mud will sink to the bottom, and the water on top will be clear and pure enough to see your beard and eyebrows and to examine the lines on your face. But if a slight wind passes over its surface, the submerged mud will be stirred up from the bottom, and the clarity and purity of the water at the top will be disturbed so that it is impossible to obtain the correct impression of even the general outline of the face. Now, the mind is just the same.⁹⁸

There is a strikingly similar passage in the *Zhuangzi*:

The sage is still not because he takes stillness to be good and therefore is still. The ten thousand things are insufficient to distract his mind—this is the reason he is still. Water that is still gives back a clear image of beard and eyebrows; reposing in the water level, it offers a measure to the great carpenter. And if water in stillness possesses such clarity, how much more must pure spirit. The sage's mind in stillness is the mirror of Heaven and earth, the glass of the ten thousand things.⁹⁹

If someone wants to clearly recognize the things in the world without distortion, he must pacify his *xin* to resemble the undisturbed water surface which could reflect clearly the images of objects. For Zhuangzi, external things could stir up the emotions and desires in ourselves. So Zhuangzi argued for stillness in the *xin* so as to avoid the interruption of external things.

⁹⁸ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 21.7b.

⁹⁹ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 13, p. 142.

From the passages above, we could see that in Xunzi's view, "stillness" is a state of *xin* that is free from interruptions of illusions, dreams, etc. Only if *xin* attains the state of "stillness", can it perform its thinking functions properly and reflect the Confucian way without distortion. For Zhuangzi, similarly, "stillness" means that we could prevent the *xin* being interrupted by all kinds of illusions and temptations so as to reflect the Daoist way without distortion. They are similar in using the term "stillness" in that the purpose is to reflect the Way without distortion, whether it is the Confucian way or Daoist way. Thus, we might suppose that Xunzi was influenced by Zhuangzi in the respect of "stillness," or at least they shared a common point that helped Xunzi to expand Confucian philosophical psychology. Of course, the purpose of Xunzi for achieving stillness in the *xin* is for realizing the Confucian way, while that of Zhuangzi is for the Daoist way.

Some scholars have noticed the similarities between Xunzi's and Zhuangzi's use of the terms *xu*, *yi* and *jing*, and have suggested why Xunzi borrowed them from Zhuangzi. Lee H. Yearley, for example, insightfully argues that the purpose of Xunzi in using these terms is to achieve a detached *xin*, which is not obsessed by external objects and one's own views. Thus, Xunzi adopted these three terms from Zhuangzi to "allow people to act in the world and yet to attain a fulfillment defined in large part by equanimity and detachment." In Yearley's view, "Hsun Tzu's [Xunzi's] attempt to synthesize the insights of Taoism and the previous Confucian traditions rests on his vision of how the mind allows a person to be both active and detached."¹⁰⁰ While

¹⁰⁰ Lee H. Yearley, "Hsun Tzu on the Mind: His Attempted Synthesis of Confucianism and Daoism," *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 39 (1980), p. 480.

Yearley is quite right that Xunzi used these three terms to describe the processes by which one attains a detached mind in order to make a reasonable moral judgment according to different circumstances, Xunzi has a further purpose. In fact, Xunzi used these three terms to refer not only to the making of a reasonable moral judgment according to different circumstances, but also to the attainment of a kind of moral teaching and political teaching that are adaptable to the times.

Aaron Stalnaker also explains why Xunzi used these terms in nourishing *xin*.

Without “emptiness” no one could learn about different ways of existence, about more refined and constructive choices and modes of satisfaction. Without “unity” no one could understand complex phenomena, whether social or natural, nor could anyone deliberate effectively on practical matters with distant consequences, nor could one focus sufficiently on the Confucian way to succeed in remaking one’s innate impulses in a more suitable, sagely form. Without “tranquility” no one could get sufficiently beyond the tugs of desire and emotion to step back and approve disciplined plans of action, nor could anyone quiet the fears and hopes raised by our mind’s tendencies to dream and plan. Xunzi’s ideas about the mind are necessary to resolve the tension between his views of innate impulses and self-cultivation, which would otherwise be incoherent.¹⁰¹

I agree with Stalnaker that Xunzi’s account of *xin* in terms of the qualities of *xu*, *yi* and *jing* was for the purpose of keeping his own philosophy coherent. In Xunzi’s view, desires and emotions could become unruly if no external instructions are imposed on

¹⁰¹ Aaron Stalnaker, “Aspects of Xunzi’s Engagement with Early Daoism,” *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 53, no.1 (2003), p. 108.

them. For Xunzi, humans do not have innate moral awareness that could cultivate their desires and emotions. At the same time, we should not subject humans to coercive laws and punishments to make them conform to the behavioral guidelines while leaving out the moral cultivation, as the legalists do. For Xunzi, humans should on the one hand depend on themselves to conduct moral cultivation, and on the other hand rely on the external instructions guided by *li* and *fa* to make such moral cultivation feasible. In this process, *xin* becomes significant since it could accept the political and moral education and become the dominant power in controlling and cultivating desires and emotions. It is in this respect that we need to empty *xin* so that it could have extensive exposure to the political and moral education and cultivate desires and emotions to be moral. Of course, *xu*, *yi* and *jing* refer to the higher level thinking that ordinary people might not attain. For the common people, they may have to accept the political and moral education and act according to them.

A recent work by Janghee Lee also argues that the reason why Xunzi borrowed these concepts from Zhuangzi is for attaining the knowledge of *dao*.

Xunzi's fundamental concern seems to lie not in the complete transformation of ordinary *xin* into achieved *xin*, but in the articulation of the capacities of *xin* to allow people to attain the knowledge of *dao*...*li* is closely related to the notion of *dao*...*Li* furnishes *dao* with specific and "formal prescriptions for proper behavior." Accordingly, *li* can be deemed one of the core elements that embody the spirit of *dao*.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Janghee Lee, *Xunzi and Early Chinese Naturalism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 54-56.

Lee is right to point out that the purpose of Xunzi in borrowing these concepts from Zhuangzi is for attaining and exercising the knowledge of *dao*, in which *li* is one of the core elements. I wish to push his point further: the Confucian way is a much broader concept that may include not only the Confucian doctrines such as *li*, *ren*, *yi*, etc., but also some useful doctrines from other schools, including *fa*, which could be utilized to develop Confucianism to be more comprehensive.

Besides the views of the above two scholars, the reason why Xunzi adopted these concepts (*xu*, *yi*, *jing*) is not only for maintaining coherence in his philosophy and attaining the knowledge of *dao*, but more importantly to provide a way to find new knowledge that would address theoretical inadequacies in Confucian teachings that arose in part because of the direction in which Mencius had taken the tradition. Among these theoretical inadequacies which in Xunzi's view weakened Confucianism was Mencius' theory of human nature being good. The next chapter will examine how Xunzi provided Confucianism with an alternative theory of human nature that he believed to be more plausible and to provide a better basis for the Confucian theory of moral cultivation and good government.

CHAPTER THREE

CONFUCIAN TEACHINGS OF HUMAN NATURE (*XING*)

For Xunzi, to achieve the Confucian moral and political ideals, people need to learn both moral knowledge and political knowledge from authoritative teachers and moral exemplars. Here, we may wonder why Xunzi argued for learning from others instead of learning by oneself. Not only teachers and exemplars are needed, both *li* and *fa* are also important instruments in Xunzi's view of moral education and self-cultivation. Xunzi differs from Mencius in this because of their very different views of human nature. This chapter will show how Xunzi incorporated non-Confucian teachings which were probably borrowed from other schools to improve on Confucian teachings on human nature.

To begin the discussion of *xing* in Confucianism, I will first introduce the closely related concept of *tian*, which is an important philosophical concept in Confucianism. Examining what *tian* means in Confucianism and its relationship with *xing* would help us to make an in-depth study on Confucian teachings of moral cultivation. Next, the problem surrounding *tian* in Confucianism preceding Xunzi is discussed in detail. After that, Xunzi's solutions to this problem are set out. Here, I hope to explain how Xunzi's view of natural *tian* successfully solves the problem existing in the moral teachings of Confucius and Mencius by incorporating Zhuangzi's view of natural *tian*. Influenced by the latter's naturalistic view of *tian*, Xunzi formulated a different view of *xing*, which provided a solution to problems of *xing* in the teachings of Confucius and Mencius. Throughout the discussion of how Xunzi solved the problem of *tian* and

xing in former Confucianism, I will also examine the possible influence of non-Confucians on Xunzi and how Xunzi incorporated these non-Confucian teachings into his reconstruction of Confucianism.

Confucian Moral Cultivation: The Role of *Xing* and *Tian*

Moral cultivation is a central issue for Confucianism, whether in Confucius, Mencius or Xunzi. The purpose of Confucian teachings is to persuade people to cultivate themselves morally so as to become virtuous gentlemen. Thus, knowing what human *xing* is and how it could be transformed is central to the Confucian project of moral cultivation.

In Confucianism, the earliest interpretation on the relationship between *xing* and moral cultivation might be traced to Confucius. Confucius said,

Men are close to one another by nature (*xing*). They diverge as a result of repeated practice.¹

This passage indicates two points: 1) Human *xing* is almost the same, whether it is good or bad; 2) whether human *xing* is good or bad does not matter so much as the practice which determines how humans become after birth. It seems that Confucius emphasized *practice* rather than the nature we are born with. The people about whom Confucius made the above generalization might not include those people who are the most intelligent or stupid, since in his view those people “are not susceptible to change.”² Nevertheless, it is only a very small minority who are the most intelligent

¹ *The Analects*, 17.2.

² Refer to *The Analects*, 17.3.

or the most foolish. In general one should pay more heed to the ethical practice instead of totally relying on *xing* for moral goodness or blaming it for badness.

Compared with Confucius' ambiguous attitude to *xing*, Mencius claimed that *xing*, which is composed of the four moral sprouts (of *ren*, *yi*, *li*, *zhi*), is morally good. Nevertheless, Mencius argued that these four moral sprouts in the *xing* are only the beginning, which should be nurtured through moral cultivation so as to grow into a fully-grown moral tree.

Moral cultivation is not only concerned with human *xing*, but also related to the issue of *tian*. If *tian* is moral, then humans should complete the moral mission *tian* decrees and conduct moral cultivation in everyday life. If *tian* is amoral, people should do more in moral cultivation since *tian* does not endow humans with moral qualities. In addition, *tian* and *xing* are also interrelated. According to Mencius, *tian* is moral and endows humans with a *xing* that is moral. Yet Confucius acknowledged that *tian* does not always protect the virtuous. Xunzi offered an alternative theory of *tian* and *xing* that to him makes more realistic sense of the chaotic world and offered more effective means to address the immoralities of his times.

Challenges to Confucius' and Mencius' Moral Concept of *Tian*

In Shang Dynasty, *di* or *shangdi* (帝/上帝) is regarded as the supreme deity who could dominate the fate and life of human beings, including the rulers.³ Men could not change the fate that *di* imposed them and should follow the decree of *di* step by

³ Refer to Zhang Guangzhi 張光直, *zhongguo qingtong shidai* 中國青銅時代 (Beijing: Sanlian chubanshe, 1999), pp. 371-372.

step. In this case, *di* is the absolute ruler of humans. In Zhou Dynasty, *tian* replaced *di* as an anthropomorphic deity (*rengeshen* 人格神)⁴ who could decide the political fate of the rulers, which is still similar to the understandings of *di* in Shang Dynasty. As Kwang-Chih Chang observes,

It is interesting to note that this Shang conception of Shang Ti (*shangdi*) was not carried over by the Chou (*Zhou*) rulers. In the Chou world view, there was also a Shang Ti, similarly playing the role of a Supreme Being, but Shang Ti of Western Chou became identified with Heaven (*tian*) and separated from the world of ancestors.⁵

We can also find some evidence for this view in the texts of this period—“*Tian* gave a great charge to king Wen, to exterminate the great dynasty of Yin...”⁶

Tian is regarded as the source of the legitimacy of the rulers. But more importantly, *tian* in the period of Zhou had gradually become endowed with moral characteristics, which became an important issue to later thinkers and philosophers. In the view of Zhou people, “the decree of *tian* is not constant (*tianming michang* 天命靡常),”⁷ which means, *tian* would not eternally support one ruler or group. In this sense, *tian* becomes more flexible in dealing with human matters. If the ruler is virtuous and benevolent to his people, *tian* would favor him and support him to be the ruler. However, if the ruler could not meet the moral requirements *tian* required, he

⁴ There are some disputations among scholars about whether *tian* is a personal deity. A number of scholars, like Hou Wailu, Ren Jiyu and Fung Yu-lan believed Zhou people viewed *tian* as a personal deity with a will while Xu Fuguan and Lao Siguang denied that *tian* has connotations of a personal deity. For details of the debate, see Kwong-loi Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 207-210.

⁵ Kwang-Chih Chang, *Early Chinese Civilization: Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 157.

⁶ James Legge, trans. “The Book of Historical Documents,” in James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 3, part 2 (London: Trubner, 1861), p.385.

⁷ Luo Jiangsheng 雒江生, *Shijing tonggu* 詩經通詁 (Xian: Sanqin chubanshe, 1998), p. 681.

would be abandoned. Thus, *tian* has no preferential affections and it helps only the virtuous (*huangtian wuqin, weide shifu* 皇天無親，惟德是輔).⁸ As Fu Sinian said, the idea that deems virtue to be the most worshipful thing became increasingly influential in the period of Zhou.⁹

In the view of Confucius, *tian* endowed him with virtues and therefore he is protected by *tian*. That is why Huan Tui, who was an official of Song intending to kill Confucius, could not hurt him.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Confucius was not always sure about the support of *tian*. When he was under siege in Kuang, he said,

With King Wen dead, is not the cultural heritage (*siwen*) invested here in me? If *tian* intends this culture to be destroyed, those who come after me will not be able to have any part of it. If *tian* does not intend this culture to be destroyed, then what can the men of Kuang do to me?¹¹

Siwen for Confucius includes literature, rituals, music, customs, moralities, etc. and mainly refers to the cultural traditions of Zhou Dynasty.¹² Here, Confucius did not actually say that *tian* did not intend *siwen* to be destroyed. If it were to be destroyed, Confucius and the Zhou culture he possessed would also perish.

In other places, Confucius increasingly cast doubt on whether *tian* always favors the virtuous person. When his favorite disciple, Yan Hui, died, he lamented, “*Tian* has bereft me! *Tian* has bereft me!”¹³ Here, Confucius is not only lamenting the death of

⁸ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 3, p. 490.

⁹ Fu Sinian 傅斯年, *Fu Mengzhen xiansheng ji* 傅孟真先生集, vol. 3 (Taipei: Taiwan University, 1952), pp. 110-191.

¹⁰ *The Analects*, 7.23.

¹¹ *The Analects*, 9.5.

¹² Refer to *The Analects*, 3.14.

¹³ *The Analects*, 11.9.

Yan Hui, but also bemoaning why the moral undertakings of Yan Hui and himself were not favored by *tian* and successful in their times. We may say that the misfortunes humans encountered could be attributed to *tian*. However, Confucius maintained that we should not complain against *tian* just because *tian* does not always favor the virtuous persons: “I do not complain against *tian*, nor do I blame Man.”¹⁴

Since *tian* itself has many possibilities, supportive and counter forces coexist and occur by chance. Hence we need not complain why *tian* sometimes fails to favor or even destroys the virtuous person. *Tian* itself includes possibilities that are not within human control. In Confucius’ view, only if we could understand and face up to such contingent misfortunes, could we stop complaining against *tian* and do what we should do in the world. Thus, for a Confucian, he should know a gentleman cannot always avoid misfortunes, but would always persist in moral principles regardless of misfortunes. Confucius is one who “keeps working towards a goal the realization of which he knows to be hopeless (*zhiqui buke er weizhi* 知其不可而爲之).”¹⁵ However, it is too difficult for the common people to live up to such high ideals. If *tian* did not favor the virtuous persons and their moral undertakings, it is difficult to persuade people to conduct moral cultivation when they know the outcome of moral cultivation is often so miserable.

Confucius’ problem is also confronted by Mencius. Mencius regarded *tian* as the moral heaven which could define the moral mission of human beings. Mencius said,

There are honors bestowed by *tian* (*tianjue* 天爵), and there are honors

¹⁴ *The Analects*, 14.35.

¹⁵ *The Analects*, 14.38.

bestowed by man (*renjue* 人爵). Benevolence, dutifulness, conscientiousness, truthfulness to one's word, unflagging delight in what is good, —these are honors bestowed by *tian*.¹⁶

Like Confucius, Mencius regards *tian* as the moral authority that not only endows humans with virtues but also provides the moral mission humans should fulfill in their lives. However, as for the issue of whether the virtuous always fare well in the world, Mencius could not give a definite answer. For a fact, there are many virtuous persons suffering misfortunes. Mencius said,

Shun rose from the fields; Fu Yue was raised to office from amongst the builders;...That is why *tian*, when it is about to place a great burden on a man, always first tests his resolution, exhausts his frame and makes him suffer starvation and hardship, frustrates his efforts so as to shake him from his mental lassitude, toughen his nature and make good his deficiencies.¹⁷

Although Mencius argued that it is necessary for virtuous persons to suffer misfortune so as to enhance their abilities in future work, he did not guarantee that those who suffered misfortunes would be favored by *tian* in the end. In fact, to be favored by *tian* might require more conditions that are beyond human control. Mencius said,

Shun and Yu differed from Yi greatly in the length of time they assisted the Emperor, and their sons differed as radically in their moral character. All this was due to *tian* and could not have been brought about by man. When a thing is

¹⁶ *Mencius*, 6A16.

¹⁷ *Mencius*, 6B15.

done as though by no one, then it is the work of *tian*...¹⁸

So, for Mencius, there are always some things beyond human control, which is the working of *tian*. In responding to a question about why he seemed to complain against *tian*, Mencius answered,

This is one time; that was another time. Every five hundred years a true King should arise, and in the interval there should arise one from whom an age takes its name. From Chou to the present, it is over seven hundred years. The five hundred mark is passed; the time seems ripe. It must be that *tian* does not as yet wish to bring peace to the Empire. If it did, who is there in the present time other than myself? Why should I be unhappy?”¹⁹

It seems that Mencius also showed a feeling that *tian* was unfair to him and his moral undertakings, which, Mencius believed, were right for his chaotic times and society.

Thus, like Confucius, Mencius has no convincing answer as to why *tian* endows us with virtues but could not protect and favor the virtuous persons and their moral undertakings.²⁰ This reminds us of Kant’s acknowledgement of the difficulties with acting morally when the efficacy of moral action for bringing about happiness is uncertain. In Kant’s view, such uncertainty discourages efforts to lead a fully moral life. While acting out of respect for the moral law without regard to happiness is the supreme good for Kant, the highest good requires virtue to be rewarded with happiness. Kant could only solve the problem of the highest good by postulating

¹⁸ *Mencius*, 5A6.

¹⁹ *Mencius*, 2B13.

²⁰ See also *Mencius*, 2.14, 2.16, 9.6.

immortality and the existence of God.²¹ In the absence of a similar religious tradition, how could the Confucians reconcile virtue with happiness? Xunzi's answer is modern and Confucian in its humanistic emphasis: if the highest good is possible, it must come about by human efforts alone, human efforts made in finding better ways of knowing the world, and better ways of moral cultivation.

Xunzi's *Tian Lun*: Departure from Confucius and Mencius

Xunzi's view of *tian* is mostly presented in the essay of *Tian Lun* (Discourse on Heaven), and occasionally appears in other places of the text, such as *Wang Zhi* (On the Regulations of a King) and *Li Lun* (Discourse on Ritual Principles).

Tian as Nature

In *Wang Zhi*, Xunzi said, "Heaven (*Tian*) and Earth (*di*) are the beginning of life."²² Xunzi regarded both heaven (*tian*) and earth (*di*) as the origin of the myriad living things.

...[W]hen Heaven (*tian*) and Earth (*di*) conjoin, the myriad things are begot; when the Yin and Yang principles combine, transformations and transmutations are produced.....²³

The combination of Yin and Yang principles, which represent the proceeding rules of heaven and earth, drives the transformation and transmutation of the myriad things.

²¹ Refer to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Kant's Philosophy of Religion," see <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-religion/#3.3>, 2005.

²² *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 9.15.

²³ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 19.6.

Xunzi's view of *tian* apparently deviated from that of Confucius and Mencius. As discussed before, both Confucius and Mencius regarded *tian* as the moral heaven which could decide the moral mission and fate of humans; while in Xunzi's view, *tian* has no such moral function and it is closer to nature that gives birth to humans and all the other things. Although Xunzi's view of *tian* as nature is different from that of Confucius and Mencius, it is interestingly similar to that of Zhuangzi.

Heaven (*tian*) and earth (*di*) are the father and mother of the ten thousand things.

They join to become a body; they part to become a beginning.²⁴

When Heaven (*tian*) gives birth to the ten thousand people, it is certain to have jobs to assign them.²⁵

Thus, both Xunzi and Zhuangzi regarded *tian* as the nature that gives rise to the myriad things, including humans. Such striking similarity indicates that Xunzi might have borrowed some teachings of *tian* from Zhuangzi to reconstruct his Confucian view of *tian*. But before we can safely say this, let us further examine Xunzi's view of *tian* and its relationship with humans, within which we might find some more interesting relationships between these two thinkers.

Tian and Humans

In Xunzi's view, as one of the myriad things, a human is created by *tian* and *di*. So, what is the relationship between *tian* and humans like?

The course of *tian* is constant: it does not survive because of the actions of a Yao;

²⁴ Watson, *The Complete works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 19, p. 198.

²⁵ Watson, *The Complete works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 12, p. 130.

it does not perish because of the actions of a Jie. If you respond to the constancy of *tian*'s course with good government, there will be good fortune; if you respond to it with disorder, there will be misfortune...Accordingly, there will be famine when neither heat nor cold has reached you, and there will be misfortune even though inauspicious and freak events have not occurred...yet you can have no cause to curse *tian*, for these things are the consequences of the way that you have followed. Accordingly, if you understand the division between *tian* and mankind, then you can properly be called a "Perfect Man."²⁶

For Xunzi, humans should not blame *tian* for the natural disasters and catastrophes they encounter. In fact, these disasters are mostly caused by humans themselves and the reasons are: 1) Humans disregard the rules of *tian* when performing agricultural activities and other activities related to the natural *tian*; and 2) Humans do not create a good social order and good government to respond to the catastrophe.

Humans could not avoid the involvement of natural *tian* in an agricultural society. The myriad things including humans should heed the constant rules of *tian* in order to nurture their growth and development.²⁷ *Tian* and humans and other living things are closely related with each other instead of being separated from each other. In this respect, "the division between *tian* and humans" only means that humans should not attribute the calamities they encounter to *tian*; rather the fault is with humans not taking into account the workings of the seasons or other aspects of nature. In contemporary vocabulary, a project that does not take into account the laws of nature

²⁶ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 17.1.

²⁷ Refer to *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 17.2b.

will not succeed. In this respect, we should not regard natural disasters as the expression of *tian*'s punishment of vicious people.

Humans rather than *tian* are responsible for the losses ensuing from natural catastrophes, since they result from humans not responding to the constant way of natural *tian* with a good government. For Xunzi, these natural disasters are the constant way of *tian*, which can occur in any time and place. Although humans could not control the occurrence of natural disasters, they could do something to curb or lessen the negative consequences of these disasters. That is to say, humans should construct an orderly society and a good government to counter or mitigate the bad consequences of natural catastrophe. If an irresponsible government does not respond to the calamities in a timely manner, the negative consequences of natural catastrophes would cause more suffering than necessary. So, a good and responsible government is needed to deal with these natural calamities.

In Xunzi's view, even if natural catastrophe does not occur, a disaster would also occur if humans could not construct a good government. Without flood or drought, famine could still happen through bad management; without heat or cold, sickness could still occur in people—all these “human disasters” (*renyao* 人祲) are caused by the fault of humans not developing a good government and good social order, which guarantees the safety and happiness of people. If a government is cruel to the people, the people will lack food, die of sickness, etc. All these phenomena are similar to those of natural disasters in causing human suffering. However, they are not caused by natural disasters but result from a malfunctioning government.

Both Xunzi and Zhuangzi regarded *tian* as nature, and not the moral authority who could decide the moral mission and fate of human beings. Thus, whether the virtuous people encounter fortune or misfortune could not be attributed to *tian* since *tian* is amoral nature. Zhuangzi also attributed this to the fault of humans themselves.

Yi Er Zi went to see Xu You. Xu You said, “What kind of assistance has Yao been giving you?” Yi Er Zi said, “Yao told me, ‘You must learn to practice benevolence and righteousness and to speak clearly about right and wrong!’” “Then why come to see me?” said Xu You. “Yao has already tattooed you with benevolence (*ren*) and righteousness (*yi*) and cut off your nose with right and wrong. Now how do you expect to go wandering in any far-way, carefree, and as-you-like-it paths?”²⁸

This dialogue demonstrates that benevolence, righteousness, right, and wrong are all humans’ inventions that could hurt humans themselves. However, as we know, benevolence and righteousness are just what Confucians struggle to cultivate. So, Zhuangzi attributed the misfortunes humans encountered to conventional (Confucian) morality among other things. In the *Zhuangzi*, Jie Yu, a recluse of state of Chu, lamented the situation of the sage in his times:

When the world has the Way, the sage succeeds; when the world is without the Way, the sage survives. In times like the present, we do well to escape penalty. Good fortune is light as a feather, but nobody knows how to hold it up. Misfortune is heavy as the earth, but nobody knows how to stay out of its way.²⁹

²⁸ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 6, p. 89.

²⁹ Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, chap. 4, p. 66.

This depicts a contemporary attitude on how to live wisely in a time of chaos. For Jie Yu, it seems that the moral cultivation would even lead to the misfortunes. Jie Yu's project of retiring from society and living a private life seems to be more attractive than that of Confucius and Mencius. This is because the latter could not persuade people to conduct moral cultivation as they could not determine whether one would meet fortunes or misfortunes as a result of moral cultivation. Thus, one would be tempted to ask why the people should not choose to live outside society and keep their lives intact, as Jie Yu suggests?

Xunzi responded to such challenges by assimilating Zhuangzi's point that the misfortunes humans encountered could not be attributed to *tian* but should be blamed on humans themselves. However, Xunzi's assimilation was not without reservation—Xunzi regarded the misfortunes as due to human fault of not heeding the natural rules of *tian* or not establishing a good government while Zhuangzi viewed moral cultivation as the origin of misfortunes. In this sense, Xunzi thought that human effort in moral cultivation is so far from satisfactory that the misfortunes could not be avoided while Zhuangzi deemed that it is human effort in moral cultivation that resulted in these misfortunes.

Zhuangzi's and Xunzi's views that *tian* and humans should be divided are different from that of Confucius and Mencius since in the latter's view, *tian* and humans are related in terms of morality. In Confucius' and Mencius' views, the realms of *tian* and humans have the same rules and values, that is, morality. As discussed before, such a moral view of *tian* leads directly to the conclusion that

humans should complete the moral mission *tian* decrees, even if *tian* does not always favor the virtuous persons. Such a way of moral persuasion is not effective since people would certainly be concerned with realistic outcomes. Zhuangzi's naturalistic view of *tian* might have given some ideas to Xunzi in his search for a more plausible relationship between *tian* and human that pointed to a possible road to better results in reconciling virtue and happiness, or at least not allowing one to undermine the other.

As for why the virtuous or moral undertakings could not be achieved in his time, Xunzi also provided an answer. The chaos and disorders in that age made the rulers indifferent to Confucian moral teachings and this directly resulted in the failure of Confucian moral undertakings. However, we should not blame *tian* or the times, but should seek the cause in the inadequacies of Confucian teachings, which are not practical for attaining the Confucian moral ideal in the time of late Warring States period. So, the teachings of Confucius and Mencius should be improved.

Thus, it seems that Xunzi incorporated some teachings from Zhuangzi to improve Confucianism to be more adaptable to the time. For Xunzi, it seems that it is humans themselves who could achieve the highest good. We should not depend on *tian* or God to bestow happiness on humans; instead, we should depend on ourselves to acquire happiness.

Although Xunzi assimilated some teachings from Zhuangzi regarding *tian*, the point Xunzi is more concerned with is how to "conform to the Way" that would produce a good social order and government. Conforming to the Way in Xunzi includes cultivating humans to be moral and to behave according to the rituals and

moral principles. Although *tian* provides the nurture with which the myriad things including humans could live, there are some other things more important for humans: the rituals and moral principles the sage created. To create, preserve and transmit the rituals and moral principles is the primary task for the sage.

This is the basic distinction between Zhuangzi and Xunzi in their views on *tian* and humans. In Zhuangzi's view, to cope with human affairs means attaining integration with *tian*. So, in this respect, Zhuangzi's emphasis on human affairs is only for the purpose of attaining the way of *tian*. On the contrary, Xunzi regarded human affairs as the most important thing for humans to be involved in, if not the sole objective and *tian* is merely the environment or conditions that must be appropriately managed to achieve the human goal. To achieve an orderly human society and a good government is Xunzi's goal. Xunzi said,

Men are born with desires which, if not satisfied,...lead to disorder. Disorder leads to poverty. The Ancient Kings...established the regulations contained within rituals and moral principle in order to apportion things, to nurture the desire of men, and to supply the means for their satisfaction.³⁰

In Xunzi's view, although Zhuangzi focused on *tian* as the way of keeping one's life intact, he did not realize that humans could not do so without a good social order, which results from the moral cultivation guided by *li* and moral principles. It is in this respect that moral cultivation plays a key role in keeping up a good social order and keeping life intact for a person. Having acknowledged this, we are now in a better

³⁰ Xunzi, vol. 3, 19.1a.

position to understand Xunzi's verdict in *Jie Bi* (Dispelling Errors) that "Zhuangzi was blinded by *tian* and was insensible to men."³¹

Xunzi was not saying that Zhuangzi did not care about humans and only sought to integrate with *tian*. Zhuangzi indeed emphasized the importance of keeping life intact in a time of chaos. However, Zhuangzi's approach of achieving such Daoist ideal is to integrate with *tian* instead of resorting to human efforts. This approach is what Xunzi objected to. In Xunzi's view, without moral cultivation, there will be no good social order, which would only subject human life to the dangers of disorders.

Although Zhuangzi was criticized by Xunzi for not resorting to human morality to keep life intact, his claim that nourishing life and keeping life intact is the most important thing for a person to do is especially significant in the time of chaos. In this sense, it posed a great challenge to Confucius' and Mencius' teachings of moral cultivation since the latter could not even guarantee the safety of human life while the former could at least provide an approach for keeping life intact. This is also the reason why Xunzi assimilated some teachings from Zhuangzi to strengthen Confucianism in this respect, but he stopped well short of agreeing with Zhuangzi's rejection of Confucian morality.

As *tian* is amoral in Xunzi's view, it seems that human *xing*, which is endowed by the natural *tian*, has no moral elements in itself. Based on the assumption of natural *tian*, Xunzi formulated his own view of human *xing*, that is, that human *xing* is bad. However, in Mencius, since *tian* is moral, human *xing* endowed by *tian* is also

³¹ Xunzi, vol. 3, 21.4.

good. Thus, Mencius and Xunzi held totally contrary views on human *xing*, which is a central debate within pre-Qin Confucianism.

Xing is Good

Although Confucius said little about *xing*, much less the relationship between *tian* and *xing*, Mencius examined the relationship between *tian* and *xing* in detail. Mencius regarded *tian* as the moral heaven that endows humans with moral sprouts,³² which distinguish humans from animals. Mencius claimed that once a person has developed these four moral sprouts in the heart into full-blown moral qualities that could be practiced and observed in everyday life, he could be said to have known the *xing* of human beings and *tian*.³³ Thus, we could see how Mencius' view of moral *tian* affects his view of *xing*: Since *tian* is the moral heaven that endows humans with moral sprouts, and human *xing* lies just in these moral sprouts, then moral heaven directly gives birth to moral human *xing* (that is, the moral sprouts). But does *xing* really refer only to the moral sprouts humans possess? *Mencius* seems inconsistent at times, e.g. in 7B24, sensory desires seem to be the *xing* of human beings. The reason why *xing* could include sensory desires may also be attributed to Mencius' view of *tian*. Although *tian* is moral in the view of Mencius, *tian* is also the creator of all myriad things. In this sense, *tian* comes very close to "nature,"³⁴ which not surprisingly includes sensory desires. So, *xing* in Mencius includes both sensory desires and moral sprouts.

³² *Mencius*, 2A6.

³³ Refer to *Mencius*, 7A1.

³⁴ Refer to *Mencius*, 1A6, 4B26.

Consider 7B24 again:

The way the mouth is disposed towards tastes, the eye towards colors, the ear towards sounds, the nose towards smells, and the four limbs towards ease is human *xing*, yet therein also lies the *ming*. That is why the gentleman does not describe it as *xing*. The way benevolence pertains to the relation between father and son, duty to the relation between prince and subject, the rites to the relation between guest and host, wisdom to the good and wise man, the sage to the way of Heaven, is the *ming*, but therein also lies human *xing*. That is why the gentleman does not describe it as *ming*.³⁵

In Mencius, the difference between a gentleman and a petty person lies in their attitudes towards how to treat sensory desires and moral inclinations in their *xing*. A petty person would abandon persisting in the moral inclinations in his heart. He would like to follow sensory desires which is easy, although whether he satisfies these desires or not is unknown and therefore a matter of *ming*. Faced with the choice between sensory desires and moral mission, the petty person would choose to seek sensory satisfaction since it would be much more difficult to attain the moral ideal.

The gentleman would have a different attitude. He would regard the satisfaction of sensory desires as a matter of contingency, determined as it is by *ming*. He would abandon seeking satisfaction of sensory desires and persist in the gentlemen's learning. This point is just what Confucius said,

If wealth were a permissible pursuit, I would be willing even to act as a guard

³⁵ Mencius, 7B24.

holding a whip outside the market place. If it is not, I shall follow my own preferences.³⁶

In fact, for a gentleman, even if it is more difficult to attain the moral ideal, he would adhere to moral principles, and every step he took is an accumulation in the process of attaining the moral ideal. Once he is willing to study, he would achieve some positive fruits in the process of attaining the moral ideal, even if he could not attain it in the end. Faced with the choice between sensory satisfaction and moral ideal, the gentleman would choose the moral ideal as his primary goal. In Mencius, the gentleman should pay more attention to the elaboration of the moral sprouts innate in the heart instead of seeking to satisfy his sensory desires because sensory organs are easily misled by external things and not reliable in guiding us to be gentlemen.³⁷

For Mencius, what could be called *xing* refers less to sensory desires and more to the moral sprouts innate in our heart/mind, whose existence and natural growth shows how to cultivate oneself to be a gentleman. In other words, *xing* is not simply everything we are born with but also that which distinguishes us as human beings. In this sense, *xing* is naturally good when it comes to the discussion of moral cultivation.

Mencius' view of human *xing* as good was nevertheless challenged by many contemporaries. Gaozi, for example, disputed with him on this topic. In a dialogue with Mencius, Gaozi claimed that human *xing* is neither good nor bad, that is, human *xing* is neutral. Gaozi compared human *xing* to water, which could flow to the east if there is some crack in the east bank, or to the west if there is some crack in the west

³⁶ *The Analects*, 7.12.

³⁷ Refer to *Mencius*, 6A15.

bank. Contradicting Gaozi's argument, Mencius said,

Human nature (*xing*) is good just as water seeks low ground. There is no man who is not good; there is no water that does not flow downwards.³⁸

In Mencius, whether water flows to the west or east is not the *xing* of water but the outcome of external circumstances (the crack in the bank).

It is true that the flow of water to the east or west may result from external circumstances; however, Mencius could not deny that the tendency for water to flow downwards might still be due to factors such as the slope of the land. Can we imagine that water could still flow downwards when it is on a level ground? Thus, if *xing* could be compared to water, *xing* itself has no moral inclination to be good. Instead, whatever *xing* becomes is determined by the external circumstances or environment. In this case, Mencius' argument does not seem convincing.

Mencius compared the *xing* of the Ox Mountain to that of human beings. As the trees in the Ox Mountain are all chopped down, the mountain seems never to have the trees growing on it. This is not because the mountain originally has no trees, but the chopping caused the lack of trees on the mountain. Mencius thus argued that the four moral sprouts in the common people are just like the fate of the trees on the mountain. The common people did not nourish them; in fact, they even chopped and annihilated them. In this case, the four moral sprouts could not grow up into a full-grown tree. If someone sees such situation and regards the immorality as proving that the *xing* of human beings is not moral, he would be as mistaken as one who concludes from the

³⁸ Mencius, 6A2.

state of the Ox Mountain during Mencius' time that it is by nature treeless. In fact, if we could see how the gentleman cultivates and nourishes the moral sprouts in their *xing*, we would not arrive at such a conclusion.

Mencius' explanation of why so many people behave badly despite good human nature is far from satisfactory. Mencius argued that the reason why so many people become bad is that they could not adequately nurture their moral sprouts. However, since human *xing* is good in nature, why do people neglect or even hate to nurture the moral sprouts? Mencius explained that moral sprouts are only in the stage of sprouts, which need a good environment and nurturance so as to develop itself. Still, how do we know that people who behave badly in reality do not do so because they do not have those moral sprouts? Since we could not know that moral sprouts exist except by projecting backwards from the behavior of good people, how could we conclude that human *xing* is good from the vicious behaviors of bad people? It seems that Mencius could not explain this problem adequately.

***Xing* is Bad**

In *Xing E*, Xunzi criticized Mencius as follows:

Mencius contended that "since man can learn, his nature is good."

I say that this is not so. It shows that Mencius did not reach any real understanding of what man's inborn nature (*xing*) is and that he did not investigate the division between those things that are inborn in man and those that are acquired...What cannot be gained by learning and cannot be mastered by

application yet is found in man is properly termed “inborn nature.” What must be learned before a man can do it and what he must apply himself to before he can master it yet is found in man is properly called “acquired nature (*wei*).” This is precisely the distinction between “inborn” and “acquired” natures.³⁹

Xunzi argued that Mencius was confused about the division between inborn nature and acquired nature, that is, *xing* and *wei*. In Xunzi’s view, *xing* is what humans are born with. Rituals and moral principles are what humans acquired through learning. It is because human *xing* is bad and not satisfactory that people need to learn the rituals and moral principles to cultivate their *xing*. If human *xing* is good, just as Mencius claimed, we will only depend on our moral voluntariness to develop the moral sprouts to be mature. This is a very risky strategy as we really do not know whether people would develop these moral sprouts voluntarily or not. In this case, if we believe human *xing* is bad, we could at least devise some practical method, such as *li* and *fa*, to make people behave well, and even more ambitious, to cultivate them to be moral.

Having disagreed with Mencius on the moral characteristics of *tian*, Xunzi inevitably disagreed with him about whether *xing* is good. Since *tian* in Xunzi is just like nature and has no moral elements in itself, *xing* that is endowed by *tian* should also have no moral qualities.

Xing and Its Implications

Xunzi regarded *xing* as what human beings are born with. He said,

³⁹ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 23.1c.

What characterizes a man from birth is called his nature (*xing*). What is produced out of the harmony of inborn nature, out of the sensibilities of the organ tallying as the senses respond to stimuli, and what from birth is effortless and spontaneous are called *xing*.⁴⁰

Thus, *xing* is inborn human nature. It includes no artificial element. In Xunzi's view, *xing* is endowed by *tian*—"Xing is the consequence of *tian*."⁴¹ Since *tian* is the amoral nature in Xunzi's view, does it mean that human *xing*, which is endowed by *tian*, is also amoral, i.e. neither good nor bad? It is not the case. Xunzi argued that *xing* consists of various emotions (*qing*).

The feelings of liking and disliking, of delight and anger, and of sorrow and joy that are inborn in our *xing* are called emotions.⁴²

We should notice that the term *qing* in the *Xunzi* is a much broader category referring to various capacities of the human being other than the emotions. It also refers to the desires in humans. Xunzi said,

A people that are not made prosperous will have no means of caring for the needs of their essential natures (*qing*). A people that are not taught will have no means of introducing rational order into their inborn nature (*xing*).⁴³

Now, it is the *xing* of man that when hungry he desires something to eat, that when cold he wants warm clothing, and that when weary he desires rest—such are essential qualities inherent in his *qing* and *xing* (情性).⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 22.1b.

⁴¹ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 22.5b.

⁴² *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 22.5b.

⁴³ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 27.52.

⁴⁴ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 23.1e.

As seen in above passages, *qing* refers to not only the emotions of humankind, but also the biological nature of human beings. It is human *xing* that humans have desires for food, clothes, etc. Thus, when humans feel hungry, they will seek food; when they feel cold, they will seek warm clothes—such is the biological nature of humankind.

Thus, in Xunzi's view, human *xing* consists of various emotions and desires. If a person indulges himself in sensory pleasures and desires without any moderation, he will be regarded as a beast instead of a man.⁴⁵ The outcome of animals following original *xing* is plenty of fierce wars and struggles among them, which make the weak prey for the strong. In this case, under the assumption that human *xing* is full of unruly desires and emotions, if humans only follow their original *xing*, just like animals, humans would also fall into the struggles and wars for food, sex, etc., and human society would fall into chaos. Thus, Xunzi firmly believed that human *xing* is bad. It is in this sense that Xunzi believed that a person should restrain himself from seeking the satisfaction of desires and enjoying pleasures excessively and should cultivate their *xing* according to the moral principles invented by the sage.

Although Xunzi rejected the idea that moral sprouts or qualities endowed by *tian* exist in the *xing*, he believed some other faculties besides emotions and desires also belong to *xing*. For Xunzi, the senses also belong to the *xing*. He said, "Now, it belongs to the *xing* of man that the eye is able to see and the ear to hear."⁴⁶ In addition, the faculty of knowing also belongs to the *xing*.

As a general principle, the faculty of knowing belongs to the *xing* of man. That

⁴⁵ Refer to *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 6.2.

⁴⁶ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 23.1d.

things are knowable is a part of the natural principle of order of things. Men use their innate faculty of knowing to seek the natural principles of order, which allow things to be known.⁴⁷

Xing not only consists of irrational and unruly emotions, but also the faculty of knowing, which allows for the cultivation of *xing*. In fact, if we have no such faculty of knowing, we could not grasp the essence of rituals and moral principles and voluntarily act according to them, even though the rituals and moral principles continuously instruct us on what we should or should not be doing. This also indicates that in Xunzi's view, rituals and moral principles are not something imposed on people totally coercively, but should transform human *xing* from the inside and the faculty of knowing should understand the rituals and moral principles.

Xing itself includes the faculty of knowing, which makes the cultivation of *xing* possible. In Xunzi's view, *xing* is bad while it still retains the potential capacity of being transformed to be good due to the existence of the faculty of knowing. Although the faculty of knowing is not actually bad, it is by no means good since it is only a potential quality humans have and not the good talent or morality already existing in the *xing*.

In Xunzi's view, human *xing* is bad and this is the reason why the conscious effort is needed. Human *xing* is full of aggressiveness, greed, envy, and such which, without the regulation and cultivation of conscious effort (*wei*), would cause one to deviate from the right track. In the beginning of *Xing E*, Xunzi said,

⁴⁷ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 21.9.

Human *xing* is bad; any good in humans is acquired by conscious exertion. Now, the nature of man is such that he is born with a love of profit....This being the case, when each person follows his inborn nature and indulges his natural inclinations, aggressiveness and greed are certain to develop.⁴⁸

Thus, Xunzi explicitly argued that human *xing* is bad, which is in sharp contrast with Mencius' view of human *xing* as good. Although the distinction between Xunzi and Mencius in terms of *xing* is widely acknowledged in current scholarship, the reason why Xunzi departed from Mencius in this respect is not sufficiently explained in current scholarship.⁴⁹ In my view, Xunzi's departure from Mencius in terms of *xing* is because he considered Mencius' theory of human nature to be implausible and pernicious in having the effect of discouraging people from the efforts needed for moral cultivation. In Xunzi's view, since *xing* is bad and we have no moral sprouts in ourselves, if people are not cultivated by rituals and moral principles, and they do not make conscious effort in learning and practicing rituals and moral principles, there will be chaos and disorders in human society.

In addition, for Xunzi, since human *xing* is bad, we should not expect people to cultivate themselves to be good voluntarily; instead, we should depend on inspiring teachers and moral exemplars to influence people to learn *li* and *fa*, which will regulate and cultivate their *xing* to be moral. Compared with Mencius, Xunzi emphasized more on external education and exemplar, instead of merely expecting people to conduct moral cultivation voluntarily. Such argument is more realistic than

⁴⁸ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 23.1a.

⁴⁹ Burton Watson, trans. *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu and Han Fei Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 5.

Mencius' since it takes into account the fact that people would not like to conduct moral cultivation voluntarily in reality, especially in a time of chaos. Xunzi told us that we should not expect too much for human *xing* and regard human *xing* as possessing an innate moral sense of cultivating itself. A more feasible measure is to cultivate human *xing* through the moral instruction instituted by the sage. For Xunzi, to achieve the Confucian moral goal of being a gentleman, this would be a much more effective and realistic approach.

Here, we should notice that Xunzi did not intend to eliminate desires and emotions totally. In fact, Xunzi did admit desires and emotions should be satisfied to some extent. Moral cultivation can transform these desires into a controllable form so that they could be satisfied easily instead of being repressed totally. In this way, human desires and materials in the society could be balanced to some extent. In Xunzi's view, whether someone would like to conduct moral cultivation voluntarily might not be so important; the more important thing is to learn *li* and *fa* under the influence of awe inspiring teachers and exemplars so that people could achieve the goal of moral cultivation on one hand, and could live in the society without worrying about their living needs on the other hand. If such external cultivation succeeds, people will then begin to behave morally voluntarily.

Although Xunzi's claim that human *xing* is bad is more persuasive than Mencius' view that human *xing* is good, someone could still ask: if human nature is bad and no one is an exception to this, then how is it possible for some people to become sages, or sage kings? To put the question differently, how do the rules of *li*

get established in the first place?

To answer this question, we need to examine Xunzi's discussion of the origin of *li*. Xunzi said,

How did *li* arise? I say that men are born with desires which, if not satisfied, cannot but lead men to seek to satisfy them. If in seeking to satisfy their desires men observe no measure and apportion things without limits, then it would be impossible for them not to contend over the means to satisfy their desires. Such contention leads to disorder. Disorder leads to poverty. The Ancient Kings abhorred such disorder; so they established the regulations contained within *li* in order to apportion things, to nurture the desires of men, and to supply the means for their satisfaction.⁵⁰

Thus, in Xunzi's view, human *xing* is bad and no one (including the sage kings) is an exception. However, even if the sage king's *xing* is bad, he realizes that if all people hunt for what they desire without any moderation, they will conflict with each other and the society would fall into a chaos. In this case, no one including themselves could survive in the society. To avoid such a situation, the sage kings have to design some codes of conduct, which is the origin of *li*, to regulate human behaviour and make sure that everyone in the society could survive in the world. The reason why the sage kings could establish *li* is not because his *xing* is good or has some good elements. Instead, the crucial point here is: if we all follow our own *xing*, we could not survive in the world. In this case, the establishment of *li* is the outcome of realistic

⁵⁰ Xunzi, 19.1a.

thinking rather than that of the sage kings' good human *xing*. The reason why the sage king could establish *li* is that he realizes that *li* is the best way for achieving the public good. As Nivison observes,

The paradox is perhaps resolved by the fact that philosophers, understanding that the good is in fact the “best” for them and all people, thereby give themselves reason to love it.⁵¹

Xunzi's view sounds familiar when we examine Hobbes' text. Hobbes wrote,

And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only), endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another.⁵²

In this sense, Hobbes argued that the “Commonwealth”—prime covenant, should be established to guarantee human life. Such prime covenant is similar in motivation to what Xunzi defines as *li*, which works as the contracts regulating everyone's activity. Thus, we might say that Xunzi is also a contractarian to some extent.⁵³

Xunzi and Shang Yang

Xunzi's view of bad human *xing* is quite similar to that of Shang Yang, who is considered the founder of Legalism.⁵⁴ Shang Yang enacted numerous reforms in the state of Qin that changed Qin from a peripheral, backward state into a militarily

⁵¹ David S. Nivison, *The Ways of Confucianism* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), p. 87.

⁵² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (New York: Penguin, 1968), 13.3.

⁵³ Paul Rakita Goldin also held such view. See his work, *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), pp.62-69.

⁵⁴ As a systematic school, Legalism emerged in the movement of reform in the Warring States period, when Duke Xiao of Qin appointed Shang Yang as the prime minister to implement reforms.

powerful and strongly centralized state.⁵⁵ He is the supposed author of the *Shang Jun Shu*, which claims that human *xing* is profit-loving.

It is the nature of the people, when they are hungry, to strive for food; when they are tired, to strive for rest; when they suffer hardship, to seek enjoyment; when they are in a state of humiliation, to strive for honor. Such is the natural disposition of the people. If the people strive for gain, then they lose the rules of polite behavior...⁵⁶

Xunzi also said something similar to this.

The *xing* of man is such that he is born with a love of profit. Following this nature will cause its aggressiveness and greedy tendencies to grow and courtesy and deference to disappear.⁵⁷

Such striking similarity with Shang Yang's teachings and Xunzi's experience in Qin⁵⁸ may prompt us to suppose that Xunzi was probably influenced by Shang Yang's thinking to some extent.

Although Xunzi was similar to Shang Yang in their views on human *xing*, their attitudes to the morality of human *xing* differ. It should be noted that Shang Yang only affirmed human *xing* as profit-loving, which is different from Xunzi's moral judgment that human *xing* is bad. Shang Yang said,

It is people's nature, when measuring, to take the longest part, when weighing, to take the heaviest, when adjusting the scales, to seek profit. If an intelligent prince

⁵⁵ Refer to Wikipedia, "Shang Yang", see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shang_Yang.

⁵⁶ J. J. L. Duyvendak, *The Book of Lord Shang* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1928), p. 217.

⁵⁷ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 23.1a.

⁵⁸ Refer to *Xunzi*, vol.1, pp. 20-22.

watches these three things diligently, order may be established in the country and the capacities of the people may be utilized.⁵⁹

Shang Yang did not intend to judge human *xing* morally. Instead, his primary concern was, by understanding human *xing*, to devise some kind of law and regulatory systems to rule the people instead of cultivating them to be moral. This is also the difference between Legalism and Confucianism. In Legalism, to cultivate and transform human *xing* is too slow, ineffective and even impossible in making a stable and strong state. In this case, laws and regulations would be much more effective and practical. However, for Confucians, moral cultivation is always important as it is an indispensable condition for making a good government. Xunzi adhered to this Confucian belief. For Xunzi, even if we could have an orderly society and stable state through the function of legal systems, we could not establish the highest level of good government without moral cultivation. What Xunzi tried to do is to achieve the Confucian moral and political ideals more effectively by allowing some room for external means of socialization in transforming the people and leading them to moral cultivation.

Although Xunzi and other Confucians all insisted on moral cultivation as necessary, Xunzi's approach of persuading people to conduct moral cultivation is different from that of Confucius and Mencius. Such difference originates from Xunzi's different view of *tian* and *xing*, which was probably influenced by non-Confucians. Xunzi might have utilized the new methodology of "emptiness, unity

⁵⁹ Duyvendak, *The Book of Lord Shang*, pp. 221-222.

and stillness (*xu*, *yi* and *jing*)” to assimilate Zhuangzian theory of *tian* and Shang Yang’s doctrine of human *xing* to reshape Confucianism in terms of moral cultivation. In the next chapter, we will see how Xunzi employs his view of human nature as the basis for addressing the problems of politics and reshaped Confucian political philosophy.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONFUCIAN POLITICAL TEACHINGS

In Xunzi's view, human *xing* is bad and this is the reason why people need to cultivate themselves morally. Confucius and Mencius emphasized the importance of a good government setting the example for people to lead a moral life. But if people are not willing to cultivate themselves, despite exemplary moral leaders, what could be done? Struggling with this problem led Xunzi to a very different, more pessimistic view of the nature of politics, and therefore different recommendations about how to achieve good government in comparison with Confucius and Mencius. This chapter aims to show how Xunzi borrowed from non-Confucians to modify the Confucian theory of good governance based on the understanding that human nature is bad.

This chapter first discusses the different views of good government in Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi to show how Xunzi's view of good government followed and developed that of Confucius while that of Mencius deviated from Confucius'. Confucius argued for *li* and allowed some room for *fa* in achieving a good government. Mencius neglected *li* and almost completely ignored *fa* as the approach to achieve a good government. In this case, Xunzi developed Confucius' teachings of *li* and *fa*. He not only regarded *li* as necessary for achieving a good government, but also went beyond Confucius to regard *fa* as an indispensable way in cultivating the people to be moral.

This chapter then investigates the different views of these three thinkers on *wang*

and *ba*. Due to their different understandings of *ren* government, both Confucius and Xunzi allowed some room for the morally imperfect ruler who nevertheless benefited the people to some extent. Thus, for both of them, *ba* should also be accepted as an acceptable alternative in governing. For Mencius, however, *ba* is not acceptable in governing. Mencius' rejection of *ba* is not realistic at the time of the late Warring States period as most of the rulers at this time had no interest in moral cultivation and the moral ideal of *wang*. Xunzi was more realistic in allowing *ba* as an alternative in governance and provided a stronger theory of good government in terms of practicality and different possible achievements. Xunzi's incorporation of *fa* and *ba* might have been influenced by Shang Yang, but Xunzi modified *fa* and *ba* to meet the need of improving Confucianism.

Good Government

Confucius' View of Good Government

In Confucius' teachings, moral cultivation and state governance are not separated. For Confucius, to make an orderly state and good government, an official must learn to be moral in everyday practice. Confucius said,

The rule of virtue (爲政以德) can be compared to the Pole Star which commands the homage of the multitude of stars without leaving its place.¹

For Confucius, if an official could govern a state with virtue, people would support him like the stars surround the Pole Star. So, what are these virtues? Confucius said,

¹ *The Analects*, 2.1.

The gentleman is generous without its costing him anything, works others hard without their complaining, has desires without being greedy, is casual without being arrogant, and is awe-inspiring without appearing fierce.²

For Confucius, only if an official could become upright by following these moral requirements, could he become an example for the people and lead the people with virtues.

To govern is to be upright. If you set an example by being upright, who would dare do otherwise?³

In another dialogue between Ji Kangzi and Confucius, Confucius compared the virtue of a gentleman to wind while that of the people to grass.⁴ For Confucius, the gentleman could influence the people to become moral, just as the grass would be blown down by the wind. Confucius seemed to believe that once a ruler or an official attains the moral ideal of gentleman, the people would also be prompted to cultivate themselves to become moral and preserve a good social order voluntarily.

As Confucius would have it, politics should be the reflection of moral relationships among the people. Confucius argued for the principle of *ren* in dealing with human relationships, which is also the principle applicable for dealing with political matters. In 12.2, Confucius replied to the enquiry about *ren* as follows,

When abroad behave as though you were receiving an important guest. When employing the services of the common people behave as though you were officiating at an important sacrifice. Do not impose on others what you yourself

² *The Analects*, 20.2.

³ *The Analects*, 12.17.

⁴ Refer to *The Analects*, 12.19.

do not desire. In this way you will be free from ill will whether in a state or in a noble family.⁵

In this passage, *ren* is crystallized as the various kinds of practices in dealing with political matters. The principle of “do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire” (己所不欲，勿施於人) is not only the principle of dealing with human relationships, but also the political principle for governing. Aside from this principle, Confucius also described how to achieve *ren* whilst governing. He said,

A benevolent man helps others to take their stand in so far as he himself wishes to take his stand, and get others there in so far as he himself wishes to get there (己欲立而立人，己欲達而達人).⁶

Once the ruler extends to the people what he himself desires and refrains from imposing what he dislikes on the people, that is, once he achieves *ren*, he could achieve a good government.

Although Confucius argued for a good government based on the moral cultivation of the ruler, he did allow some room for a kind of ruler who did not attain the highest moral level but still was able to benefit the people. For Confucius, such rulers could still be regarded as *ren*.⁷ In this case, it seems that Confucius deemed that there are two levels of *ren* government: the higher level is the government based on the moral cultivation or benevolence of the ruler; the lower level is the government based on the actual benefits and welfare a ruler could bring about for the people. For the first level, Confucius required the ruler to cultivate himself to the point of being

⁵ *The Analects*, 12.2.

⁶ *The Analects*, 6.30.

⁷ Refer to *The Analects*, 14.16.

benevolent; for the second, Confucius seemed not to require such high moral achievements—once the ruler could benefit the people substantially, he could be regarded as a good ruler and the government correspondingly a good government.

Mencius' View of Ren Government

Mencius explicitly put forward the ideal of *renzheng*, which is a moral government that requires rulers and ministers to cultivate themselves morally. Mencius said,

There is a common expression, “The Empire, the state, the family”. The Empire has its basis in the state, the state in the family, and the family in one’s own self.⁸

In Mencius, the self is transformed by moral cultivation. In this case, the importance of moral cultivation lies not only in transforming the self but is also the foundation of preserving an orderly state. The reason why the self is significant in the preservation of an orderly state lies in the fact that the state is composed of various kinds of selves, including the ruler, officials and people. If all these people could conduct moral cultivation voluntarily, the state would become orderly. Otherwise, the state would fall into chaos. If moral cultivation is so important in preserving an orderly state, how does it work?

First, Mencius deemed that the ruler should be cultivated to be moral. Once the ruler becomes moral through moral cultivation, the people would follow the moral way accordingly.

When the prince is benevolent, everyone else is benevolent; when the prince is

⁸ Mencius, 4A5.

dutiful, everyone else is dutiful; when the prince is correct, everyone else is correct. Simply by rectifying the prince one can put the state on a firm basis.⁹

Mencius argued that rulers should “devote themselves to goodness, forgetting their own exalted position.”¹⁰ That is to say, a ruler should put more stress on cultivating himself to be moral instead of acquiring property and power. For Mencius, morality is indispensable for becoming a good ruler. In other places, Mencius specified moral qualities such as respectfulness and frugality as the moral qualities that a ruler should possess.¹¹

Second, Mencius regarded the minister as another important factor in achieving the goal of good government. In Mencius, the official position should only be occupied by the virtuous. Only if these are employed as officials in a state, would the state become orderly.¹²

Nevertheless, Mencius doubted whether a virtuous person always gets the official position or even become the ruler in the end. In fact, to be a ruler might presuppose opportunities or external conditions not related to one’s moral achievement.

A common man who comes to possess the Empire must not only have the virtue of a Shun or a Yu but also the recommendation of an Emperor. That is why Confucius never possessed the Empire.¹³

Mencius noticed the gap between ideal and reality. Being moral did not make

⁹ *Mencius*, 4A20.

¹⁰ *Mencius*, 7A8.

¹¹ See *Mencius*, 4A16.

¹² See *Mencius*, 2A4.

¹³ *Mencius*, 5A6.

Confucius a ruler. On the contrary, a person who is not so perfect in moral achievement might become a ruler. Mencius noted the mistakes of rulers who were clearly not wise.¹⁴ For Mencius, although an immoral person could become a ruler, he must cultivate himself morally so as to become a good ruler in the future. Without moral cultivation, the ruler could never become a good ruler. In this sense, Mencius never abandoned the effort of persuading rulers to cultivate themselves. For Mencius, moral cultivation of the imperfect ruler is more important than just expecting a virtuous person to become a ruler one day.

Both the ruler and minister should have moral qualities in governing, which is an indispensable condition of becoming a sage king or good minister. On the contrary, if the ruler or minister is not benevolent, the state would be endangered.

An Emperor cannot keep the Empire within the Four Seas unless he is benevolent; a feudal lord cannot preserve the altars to the gods of earth and grain unless he is benevolent; A Minister or a Counselor cannot preserve his ancestral temple unless he is benevolent; a Gentleman or a Commoner cannot preserve his four limbs unless he is benevolent.¹⁵

Thus, whether a ruler or minister is benevolent or not determines the fate of a state. As we can see in above passage, for Mencius, moral cultivation should not only cultivate the ruler or minister, but also transform the nature of common people. Only when the common people are educated to be moral, is it possible for the state to become

¹⁴ Refer to *Mencius*, 2B9.

¹⁵ *Mencius*, 4A3.

orderly.¹⁶

Thus for Mencius, a good government requires the moral cultivation of the ruler and ministers. But how does such moral cultivation make it happen? Mencius said,

Treat the aged of your own family in a manner befitting their venerable age and extend this treatment to the aged of other families; treat your own young in a manner befitting their tender age and extend this to the young of other families, and you can roll the Empire on your palm...In other words, all you have to do is take this very heart here and apply it to what is over there.¹⁷

Mencius believed that once everyone in the world, whether he be a ruler, minister or common person, cultivates himself morally and extends the benevolence with which he treats his families to others, the whole state would become orderly and a good government would come into being. Mencius' project followed Confucius' teachings that "do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire (*jisuobuyu, wushiuren*)" and "A benevolent man helps others to take their stand in so far as he himself wishes to take his stand, and get others there in so far as he himself wishes to get there (*jiyuli er liren, jiyuda er daren*)."¹⁶ Mencius argued that a person should not only refrain from imposing on others what he himself does not desire, but also need to extend what he desires and likes to others. Similar to Confucius, Mencius also applied the moral principle of *ren*, which is a fundamental principle of dealing with human relationships, in modeling a good government. This indicates that Mencius further developed Confucius' teachings that ethics and government should be integrated. But

¹⁶ Also refer to *Mencius*, 1A5, 7A14.

¹⁷ *Mencius*, 1A7.

unlike Confucius, Mencius did not regard those who have not attained the highest level as *ren*, even if they had benefitted the people much. For Mencius, they are very trivial.¹⁸ This suggests that Mencius only thought of the *ren* government as one wherein rulers and ministers were *ren*. For Mencius, even if a government could keep up an orderly society, it could not be called a *ren* government unless the ruler and ministers are cultivated to be *ren*.

Mencius' view of *ren* government seems too idealistic to be achieved. Mencius' envisaging of *ren* government dispels the possible model that the ruler might not be morally perfect even if he promotes the welfare of the people. But for Confucius, such a morally imperfect ruler could still contribute to the construction of *ren* government and benefit the people. Thus, in comparison with Confucius, Mencius seemed too rigid. The time of late Warring States period urgently needed an orderly society, which might be provided by those rulers who are not so morally perfect but who could benefit the people by maintaining an orderly society. In this case, it seems unrealistic to rely only on the moral cultivation of the rulers to achieve the Confucian political ideal of good government.

Xunzi's View of Good Government

For Xunzi, the highest level of good government is also a *ren* government, in which the ruler's benevolence and love are extended to the people. Xunzi said,

His [referring to the True King] humanity (*ren*) is the loftiest in the world, his

¹⁸ Refer to *Mencius*, 2A1.

justice the most admirable, and his majesty the most marvelous. His humanity being the loftiest is the cause of no one in the world being estranged from him.¹⁹

It is because the ruler is benevolent to the people that the people would love the ruler. So, *ren* for Xunzi necessarily involves “loving others”, just like Confucius’ and Mencius’ descriptions of *ren*.

That humanity (*ren*) of which I spoke indeed involve loving others, but it is just such love for others that causes a hatred of whoever does injury to them...²⁰

In Xunzi’s view, not only should the ruler become benevolent, but the ministers should also act according to benevolent principles.²¹

Thus, Xunzi is quite similar to Mencius in describing *ren* government. However, when we continue to examine the text of *Xunzi*, we find some more interesting facts:

Thus, to elevate the worthy and employ the able; to place them in a ranked hierarchy, eminent to base; to distinguish between near and far relatives; and to assign precedence according to age from old to young—such was the Way of the Ancient Kings...Hence, one who is humane (*ren*) will be humane in regard to these matters...²²

For Xunzi, to require a ruler to extend his benevolence to other people might not be practical; instead, what is practical to do is to secure the social distinctions and social hierarchy in a good order, which will benefit the people too. In Xunzi’s view, this is also the benevolence extended to the people as the people indeed benefited from such

¹⁹ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 9.9.

²⁰ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 15.2.

²¹ See *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 12.8a.

²² *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 24.5.

normative social order. Thus, compared with Mencius, Xunzi's view of *ren* government involves more practical conditions: a ruler extends the benevolence to the people by preserving an orderly society with social ranks and hierarchy. In this case, although a ruler could not cultivate himself to become fully moral in a short time, he could at least meet the lowest standard of *ren* government while the achievement of the highest standard could be left to later. It seems that Xunzi recovered and developed Confucius' teachings in this respect: we could not deem a ruler as not benevolent just because he did not achieve the highest level of *ren*; instead, we should see whether he has carried out some policies and kept a good social order for the benefit of the people. Once the people are benefited from such policies and good social order, the ruler could at least be regarded as having achieved the first step in attaining *ren* government. In this sense, we could say that such morally imperfect ruler could still contribute to the Confucian political ideal of good government. Thus, in comparison with Mencius, Xunzi's teachings of *ren* government seem to be more plausible and realistic in the time of the late Warring States period, when most of the rulers were not concerned with moral cultivation. For Xunzi, the realization of the highest standard of good government just lies in the approaches for achieving the second-order good government.

Li and Fa as the Approaches for Achieving Good Government

Li—the Necessary Tool for Achieving a Good Government

For Confucius, *li* is an important tool for securing a good social order and hierarchy.

Confucius hoped to apply *li* in instituting an ideal hierarchical order among ruler, minister and the people.²³ For Confucius, the ruler, ministers and people all have their own social roles in a society, which means, they have their own duties for preserving a well-ordered society. They could not transgress their own duties, otherwise this would only result in chaos and disorder. For Confucius, *li* is just like a frame that regulates everyone's duties and activities, securing a good social order. Confucius said,

Do not look unless it is in accordance with the rites (*li*); do not listen unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not speak unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not move unless it is in accordance with the rites.²⁴

Li is an important principle for preserving the order between ruler and minister, ruler and the people, father and son, etc., without which, the society would fall into chaos.

Besides, *li* not only has the prescriptive functions of regulating what we should or should not do, it also elicits our sense of shame if we disobey it, which in turn transforms ourselves to be moral. Confucius said,

Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with the *li*, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves.²⁵

However, for Confucius, even if a ruler could not cultivate himself to be moral through *li* in a short time, he could at least achieve a good social order governed by *li*, and this will benefit the people. In fact, for Confucius, even if a ruler or minister could not act according to the requirements of *li*, he could also be regarded as a

²³ See *The Analects*, 12.11.

²⁴ *The Analects*, 12.1.

²⁵ *The Analects*, 2.3.

benevolent ruler or minister. In *The Analects* 3.22, Confucius condemned Guan Zhong, the prime minister of Qi state for not following *li*. However, in 14.16, Confucius praised Guan Zhong as benevolent since under his instruction, the people avoided war and enjoyed much benefit from Guan Zhong's wise strategy. Confucius indeed regarded an official as benevolent if he could bring about actual benefit and welfare for the people, even if his own achievement in *ren* or *li* is not so perfect. As we can see in the following discussions, Xunzi followed Confucius' teachings in this respect and developed it, while Mencius neglected this respect in Confucius' teachings.

In general, *ren* is more important than *li* for Mencius, and the two need not go together. Between the choice to obey the requirements of *li* or save the life of one's sister-in-law, a person should choose the latter since it is more important (*ren*) to save a life.²⁶ The neglect of *li* also extends to politics, and Mencius only persisted in the approach of moral persuasion for the ruler, that is, to persuade the ruler to be *ren* and extend his benevolence to the people. Actually, this approach later proved to be useless under the circumstances of the mid-late Warring States period. Mencius' downgrading of *li* made the achievement of *ren* government hopeless.

For Xunzi, *ren* government lies not only in the benevolence extended to the people, but also the normative social order and stable hierarchical structure. Xunzi regarded the achievement of normative social order as the first and most important step in achieving the ideal of *ren* government. To achieve the normative social order, Xunzi regarded *li* as the most important tool. Xunzi said,

²⁶ Refer to *Mencius*, 4A17.

Accordingly, the Ancient Kings acted to control them with regulations, ritual, and moral principles, in order thereby to divide society into classes, creating therewith differences in status between the noble and base, disparities between the privileges of age and youth, and the division of the wise from the stupid, the able from the incapable.²⁷

For Xunzi, *li* could preserve social order by specifying clear distinctions among the different social ranks. In Xunzi's view, all people in a society have their own desires for material goods. If all of them hunt for what they desire without moderation, society will fall into a chaos. Thus, the sage king instituted *li* to distinguish the different social ranks so as to make the people at different ranks seek different things according to their ranks. So, once the people act according to *li*, not demanding anything beyond their ranks, the state would become orderly. As we can see, Xunzi did not expect a ruler to become benevolent enough to extend his treatment of his own family to others in a short time; instead, even if a ruler could not do so, once he could employ *li* in governing, he could become a good ruler and his government could become a good government.

Although Xunzi stressed *li* as an important tool for achieving a good social order and in this sense, *li* could at least achieve the lowest standard of *ren* government, he did not forget the moral cultivation that *li* could elicit, which is the necessary approach for attaining the best government. Xunzi said,

In the past, the Ancient Kings caused there to be sharp divisions and graded

²⁷ Xunzi, vol. 1, 4.12.

differences. Hence, they caused some to be praised and others to be despised; some to be treated liberally, and others meagerly; some to have ease and enjoyment, and others a bitter and toilsome lot. They did not do this merely out of reckless extravagance or a boastful fondness for elegance, but rather they did so in order to brightly illuminate the forms and patterns of humaneness (*ren*) and to make comprehensible the obedience and accord required by humane (*ren*) principles.²⁸

So, in Xunzi's view, ritual forms are the "forms and patterns" of *ren*, which is the ultimate purpose of moral cultivation for a Confucian. For Xunzi, *li* is different from *ren* in that it requires a person to do something in accordance with some formal and prescriptive codes, which appear as the external ritual forms and patterns, while *ren* requires a person to love others as an extension of love for their own families. *Li* is the means of achieving *ren*. The reason why *li* becomes necessary in achieving *ren* lies in *li*'s external forms that could be more easily followed while *ren* is a higher moral requirement that could not be easily seen and followed by the people.

The humane (*ren*) man delights in proclaiming and manifesting it [*ren*] to others.

If it is proclaimed and manifested, smoothed and polished, imitated and repeated, then the myopic will suddenly become comprehensive, the uncultivated suddenly refined, and the stupid suddenly wise.²⁹

For Xunzi, Only if *ren* is manifested as *li*, could it be imitated, exercised and achieved.

²⁸ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 10.4.

²⁹ *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 4.10.

So, we may wonder why people would be willing to be guided by *li*. According to Xunzi, if everyone could follow the requirement of *li*, it could bring about actual benefits for them and all the other people. For example, if all people follow *li* in their everyday life, they would not fight against each other, which would bring about peace for the whole society. In fact, in Xunzi's view, at first, it is the prescriptive function of *li* that constrains people, but after that, the consequences convince people that *li* could bring about benefits for them so that they are willing to follow it and transform their nature to be moral over time. If such prescriptive *li* could only bring about the privileges for the ruler, or those at the upper social classes, the people would not accept its guidance, even though it is imposed over a long period. Instead, in this case, they would more likely overturn such prescriptive *li*. So, for Xunzi, the reason why the prescriptive *li* could achieve *ren* lies in the people's eventual realization that *li* could bring about long-term benefits for them.

Fa/Xing—the Indispensable Tool for Securing a Good Government

As a tool of government, *li* is contrasted with punishments or punitive laws (*xing*) in a famous passage from the *Analects* (2.3).

Guide them by edicts, keep them in line with *xing*, and the common people will stay out of trouble but will have no sense of shame. Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with the *li*, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves.³⁰

³⁰ *The Analects*, 2.3.

Thus, although punitive law (*xing*) plays an important role in curbing crime and making people live without trouble, it apparently has nothing to do with moral cultivation. According to the usual reading of this passage, punishment could only force the people to act according to the laws but could not elicit the shameful feelings that promote self-regulation. If the people do not feel shameful for a crime, they may violate the law once again if they think they can get away with it. On the other hand, if people could be guided by *li*, they would feel deeply shameful of vicious behavior and not transgress even when there is no chance of discovery. Thus, for Confucius, law with punishments is not as useful and effective as *li* in guiding the people to become benevolent and keeping up a good social order. So, to apply *li* in governing and finally abandon the use of punitive laws is what Confucius hoped for.

In hearing litigation, I am no different from any other man. But if you insist on a difference, it is, perhaps, that I try to get the parties not to resort to litigation in the first place.³¹

In the view of Confucius, *li* should be prior to punishment, and without the guidance of *li*, punishment might be abused. Confucius said,

When *li* and music do not flourish, *xing fa* (punishment) will not fit the crimes; when *xing fa* do not fit the crimes, the common people will not know where to put hand and foot.³²

Although Confucius argued for rituals rather than punitive law in governing a state and moral cultivation, he seemed to allow some room for punitive law in

³¹ *The Analects*, 12.13.

³² *The Analects*, 13.3.

governing a state. His position could be extended to allow for punitive law to act as a means to benevolence. As discussed before, Confucius praised Guan Zhong as benevolent since the latter had brought much benefit and welfare to the people. Although Confucius did not explicitly describe how Guan Zhong achieved such outcome, there are some clues from *Guanzi*, a book supposed to be compiled by Guan Zhong.³³ In the Chapter *Ren Fa* (Reliance on Law), we read:

The sage prince relies on established laws, not on expertise...The documents of the Zhou state: “If the laws of a country are inconsistent, whoever possesses such a country will be plagued by misfortune. Such will also be the case if his people do not obey the law, if his country changes its established laws to control its people,...and if his numerous officers and their assistants deviate from the law in attempting to establish good order.” Therefore it is said: “Law must remain constant. It is the determining factor as to whether one survives or perishes, has order or chaos....” Therefore it is called “*fa* 法.”³⁴

Thus, Guan Zhong emphasized *fa* as an important principle in securing a good social order. So, Guan Zhong’s benevolence lay in the fact that Guan Zhong had carried out a series of practical strategies including using the law to maintain an orderly society.

In this case, even if Confucius did not think highly of *fa* as it does not have the

³³ There are many different views of the authenticity of *Guanzi*. For example, Hu Shih argued that *Guanzi* was not compiled by Guan Zhong; instead, it was compiled by later generations. Zhang Dainian and Fung Yu-lan, also argued that *Guanzi* was not compiled by Guan Zhong; instead, it is a book compiled by the scholars of Qi state who admired Guan Zhong in the late Warring States period. In this sense, although Guan Zhong might not be the author of the book *Guanzi*, it is very likely that the *Guanzi* at least includes some important thoughts of Guan Zhong. Thus, it is acceptable to take the views of the *Guanzi* as represent of Guan Zhong’s philosophy, whether or not he is the author. As for the views of *Guanzi*’s author, refer to Hu Shih 胡適, *Zhongguo zhhexueshi dagang* 中國哲學史大綱, vol. 1 (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1996), pp. 10-13; Zhang Dainian 張岱年, “Guanzi xueshuo de lishi jiazhi 管子學說的歷史價值,” in *Guanzi xuekan* 管子學刊, no. 1 (1987); Fung Yu-lan 馮友蘭, *Zhongguo zhhexueshi* 中國哲學史, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), pp. 43-44.

³⁴ W. Allyn Rickett, *Guanzi—Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China*, vol. 2 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 144-146.

function of moral transformation, he could be seen to give indirect approval of Guan Zhong's strategy of using *fa* to maintain an orderly society and to achieve *ren* government.

It seems contradictory here as Confucius believed that *xing* with the implication of *fa* has nothing to do with moral cultivation. Here, we should note that Confucius never thought that Guan Zhong had conducted moral cultivation to be *ren*, even though the efficacy of his governing strategy indeed benefited the people. The reason why Guan Zhong could be regarded as *ren* is that the efficacy of his governing strategy is good for the people rather than that he was himself morally cultivated by *fa*. For Confucius, *fa* could not bring about moral transformation in a person, but it may contribute to the part of the efficacy that the *ren* government brings about.

In the text of *Xunzi*, we find that *fa* and *xing* (punishment) are both crucial to good government. *Fa* is often translated as “model” or “moral model” by Knoblock in his translation of *Xunzi*. In this case, *fa* is normally understood as the moral model instead of some legal system. Besides the understanding of *fa* as moral model, there is another important interpretation of *fa* in the context of *Xunzi*, that is, the legal system or institution. Xunzi said,

The reason that the model (*fa*) of the Three Dynasties still exists even though they have perished is that officers and bureaucrats have meticulously observed the rules and laws (*fa*), the weights and measures, criminal sanctions and penalties (*xing*), and maps and registers.³⁵

³⁵ *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 4.7.

For Xunzi, the reason why the moral model ancient sage kings created could exist in later generations lies in the officials' insistence on rules and laws. That is to say, laws and rules could safeguard the moral model from being destroyed. In this sense, *fa* is indispensable in governing well. In fact, Xunzi regarded *li* and *fa* as two basic governing tools.

If farmers divide up the land and plow it, if merchants divide up commodities and trade them, if the Hundred Craftsman divide up tasks and assist each other,...then the Son of Heaven need do no more than assume a gravely reverent attitude in his person...All these matters have been the same for all the Hundred Kings, and are the primary social divisions of ritual and of the model of law.³⁶

In Xunzi's view, the main function of *li* and *fa* is to keep the social divisions stable in a society. So, how could *fa* keep the social divisions stable? For Xunzi, it is the intimidating function of *fa* that prevents people from transgressing legal or even ritual norms.³⁷ If *li* could not make some people follow its norms, *fa* could rectify that by punishing those people who are not on the right track so that an orderly society could be secured. Thus, *fa* could also be regarded as an important tool for achieving a good government.

If *fa* has the function of maintaining a good social order, could it bring about the moral transformation that Confucius and Mencius connects with *li* or *ren*? For Xunzi, *fa* not only compels the people to act according to it through coercive means, but also influences them to be moral so that they would stick to *li* more voluntarily. Xunzi

³⁶ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 11.5b.

³⁷ Refer to *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 11.13b.

said,

Governmental ordinances, edicts, regulations, and standards that are not in accord with reason by so much as the tip of a hair should not be applied to the Hundred Clans, much less to the utterly helpless—orphans, childless old people, widows, and widowers.Lord and minister, superior and inferior, noble and base, old and young, down to commoners—all should exalt this as the standard of rectitude. *Only in this way will all examine themselves to ensure that they devote their attention to the tasks of their social class. In this all the Hundred Kings have been identical, and this principle forms the pivot and axis of all ritual principles and of the model for laws.*³⁸

Thus, if the law is fair to all and protects their rights, it could motivate the people to reflect and realize that the stable social distinction would bring about actual benefits for them so that they would stick to the laws and ritual principles voluntarily. At first, *fa* simply acts as a set of prescriptive and compulsory laws constraining human behavior. But after some time, people would be prompted to reflect on themselves and become moral when they realize the importance and benefit of keeping up the stable social distinctions. In this sense, *fa* could have the similar transformational function of *li*. It could also influence the people to stick to the ritual principles and cultivate them to be moral. Xunzi said,

In antiquity the sage kings took man's nature to be evil, to be inclined to prejudice and prone to error, to be perverse and rebellious, and not to be upright

³⁸ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 11.9a. Italics mine.

or orderly. For this reason they invented ritual principles and precepts of moral duty. They instituted the regulations that are contained in laws (*fa*) and standards. Through these actions they intended to “straighten out” and develop man’s essential nature and to set his inborn nature aright. They sought to tame and transform his essential nature and to guide his inborn nature with the Way. They caused both his essential and inborn natures to develop with good order and be consistent with the true Way.³⁹

Thus, Xunzi regarded human nature as bad and so *fa* should be imposed on human nature so as to control the unruly emotions and desires in human nature to be moral.

Although she emphasizes the importance of differentiating rituals from laws in Confucianism, Sor-hoon Tan acknowledges the transformative possibility of laws and even punishments.

One might start obeying a law to avoid penalties, but if the norm gives satisfaction, it could very well bring about the kind of transformation Confucians associate only with rites. For example, by repeatedly obeying a law against littering, I may develop a habit of not littering as well as come to appreciate the clean environment that results so much that I voluntarily will not litter even when I am in a country without such a law.⁴⁰

In this sense, besides securing the hierarchical order in a society in a prescriptive and compulsory sense, laws could transform the people to be moral at the same time. Joel

³⁹ *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 23.1b.

⁴⁰ Sor-hoon Tan, “The Dao of Politics: Rites and Laws as Pragmatic Tools of Government,” *The Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, special issue on “Chinese Philosophy and American Philosophy”, Majorie Miller ed. Forthcoming.

J. Kupperman also observed the importance of law in transforming a person's character. He argues,

Both Aristotle's and Xunzi's views on the role of law in the shaping of character (especially in the early stages) can be given a minimalist or a maximalist interpretation. The minimalist reading is that laws (along with parental and informal community encouragements and sanctions) have an important role in shaping the habits that are so important, especially in the early stages. One is very likely to develop the habit of not doing what is forbidden. A maximalist reading is that laws also embody ethical instructions, and in this are a form of modeling of what is desirable that normally will have ethical influence.⁴¹

Xunzi did not divert Confucianism into Legalism just because of his insistence upon legal systems in governing, since his proposal of instituting a legal system is not only for maintaining an orderly society, but also for cultivating the people to be moral and modeling them to be gentlemen. In Xunzi's view, *fa* could be applied in securing *li* and influencing people to be moral over time. In addition, *li* and punishment should be balanced in governing a state so that people could be cultivated to be moral and an orderly society could result. Xunzi retained Confucian tradition by resisting the Legalist view that the purpose of *fa* is only to control the people since their profit-loving nature cannot be transformed.

⁴¹ Joel J. Kupperman, "Xunzi: Morality as Psychological Constraint," in T. C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe (eds.) *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2000), pp. 95-96.

Wang and Ba

Confucius' View of Wang and Ba

Confucian accommodation of non-ideal circumstances went beyond the acceptance of the important role of laws in government. Different Confucians adopting different attitudes in accepting the non-ideal generated the debates about true or moral kingship (*wang*) and hegemons (*ba*). In this, Xunzi extended Confucius' tolerant attitude. Although Confucius hoped that a ruler could cultivate himself to be benevolent, he noticed the difficulty of becoming a sage king who is benevolent. He said,

Even with a true king it is bound to take a generation for benevolence to become a reality.⁴²

To become benevolent is a painstaking process that needs effort and practice over a long period of time, which is very hard to achieve in one's limited lifetime. So, for Confucius, even the ancient rulers, such as Yao and Shun, have trouble with sageliness.⁴³ Confucius also denied that he was a sage. He said,

How dare I claim to be a sage or a benevolent man? Perhaps it might be said of me that I learn without flagging and teach without growing weary.⁴⁴

Since the process of achieving *ren* and of becoming a sage is so hard, why did Confucius still persist in pursuing that goal? For Confucius, the ultimate moral and political ideal is to integrate moral cultivation with state governing. Although the way of achieving this goal is painstaking with slim hope of success, the process of achieving *ren* and sage king is itself valuable since it leads to the accumulating a lot

⁴² *The Analects*, 13.12.

⁴³ Refer to *The Analects*, 6.30.

⁴⁴ *The Analects*, 7.34, see also 9.6.

of worthy experiences that could be regarded as sustained improvement of oneself and of government. For Confucius, the more important thing may not be the final outcome, but the process.

Confucius did not expect every ruler to become a sage king. He even admitted that those rulers who were condemned by later Confucians as *ba*, hegemons who won large territories through military exploits and clever alliances, were good rulers in their own way. One example is Duke Huan, who was helped by Guan Zhong to become one of the five *ba* in the Spring and Autumn period.⁴⁵

Mencius' View of Wang and Ba

Compared with Confucius, Mencius seemed not so flexible in his attitude to the *ba*. Mencius emphasized that good governing only lies in *wang* instead of *ba*.⁴⁶

One who uses force while borrowing from benevolence will become leader of the feudal lords (*ba*), but to do so he must first be the ruler of a state of considerable size. One who puts benevolence into effect through the transforming influence of morality will become a true King (*wang*), and his success will not depend on the size of his state...When people submit to the

⁴⁵ There are two views of who should be identified as the five *ba*: one side regards the Duke Huan of Qi, Duke Xiang of Song, Duke Wen of Jin, Duke Mu of Qin and King Zhuang of Chu; the other side regards the Duke Huan of Qi, Duke Wen of Jin, King Zhuang of Chu, King of Wu as He Lue, King of Yue as Gou Jian. Both sides regard the Duke Huan of Qi as one of the five *ba*.

⁴⁶ There are many disputations about Mencius' view of *wangba* among the Song Confucians. One side, represented by Sima Guang 司馬光, Su Zhe 蘇轍 and Chen Liang 陳亮, argued that *wang* and *ba* in Mencius have not such distinction and the difference between *wang* and *ba* is only in the extent; however, the other side, represented by Wang Anshi 王安石, Zhang Jiucheng 張九成 and Zhu Xi 朱熹, argued that *wang* and *ba* are different in nature. In my view, the latter view seems more plausible as Mencius as a moral and political idealist certainly regarded *wang* as the ultimate ideal, while *ba* has no such moral properties that could be admired. As for the details of the disputation, see Huang Junjie 黃俊傑, *Mengxue sixiang shilun* 孟學思想史論, vol. 1 (Taipei: Dongda Publishing, 1991, pp. 443-452); also Huang Junjie 黃俊傑, *Mengxue sixiang shilun* 孟學思想史論, vol. 2 (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1997), pp. 143-155.

transforming influence of morality they do so sincerely, with admiration in their hearts.⁴⁷

For Mencius, a ruler must first cultivate himself to be benevolent enough to transform the people, and then he could be a true King. If an immoral ruler only uses force to seize the land of other people, he could not make the people submit to him voluntarily. He even regarded the achievement of Guan Zhong as insignificant.⁴⁸ Mencius condemned the five *ba* as offenders against the Three Kings since they only used force to attack other states instead of extending benevolence in governance. But the five *ba* were better than the feudal lords in his time as they at least abide by alliances and curbed the vicious behavior and immoral conduct to keep up the peace among the states while the feudal lords at this time betrayed alliances and attacked each other unduly.

The people under a *ba* are happy; those under a true King are expansive and content. They bear no ill-will when put to death, neither do they feel any gratitude when profited. They move daily towards goodness without realizing who it is that brings this about. A gentleman transforms where he passes, and works wonders where he abides. He is in the same stream as Heaven above and Earth below. Can he be said to bring but small benefit?⁴⁹

Although the people under the governance of *ba* may also benefit from *ba*, they could not be morally transformed as they would be under the governance of *wang*. Not always consistent, Mencius seemed to allow some room for *ba* to be cultivated to

⁴⁷ *Mencius*, 2A3.

⁴⁸ Refer to *Mencius*, 2A1.

⁴⁹ *Mencius*, 7A13.

be moral. He said,

Yao and Shun had it (benevolence) as their nature. Tang and King Wu embodied it. The Five *ba* borrowed it. But if a man borrows a thing and keeps it long enough, how can one be sure that it will not become truly his?⁵⁰

In the *Lianghuiwang* chapter, Mencius tried to persuade King Hui of Liang and King Xuan of Qi to share the materialistic goods and other benefits with the common people, even though the Kings had private materialistic desires for more goods and other benefits.⁵¹ For Mencius, even if a ruler is immoral in his private desires, so long as he could share his benefits with the common people, he could be transformed to be a benevolent ruler. It remained for Xunzi to develop a more consistent Confucian attitude towards the *ba*.

Xunzi's View of Wang and Ba

Xunzi argued that, since human *xing* is bad, the ruler is no exception in this regard. This leads to a more positive attitude towards the *ba*. For John Knoblock, Xunzi had two views about *wang* and *ba* during different stages of his career.⁵² In writing the book of *Zhong Ni* early in his career, Xunzi seemed to only argue for the way of *wang* in governing while condemning *ba*. Xunzi said,

Even an immature lad from the gate of Confucius would be ashamed to praise the Five Lords-Protector (*ba*) in his discourse. Why is this? I say it is because

⁵⁰ *Mencius*, 7A30.

⁵¹ See *Mencius*, 1A2, 1B4 and 1B5.

⁵² Refer to the Introduction to Book 7 and 11, in *Xunzi*, vol. 2.

such men truly can only make one ashamed to praise them.⁵³

So, at this time, Xunzi condemned *ba* since it was not following moral principles in governing a state. Thus, “Xunzi is fully in accord with Mencius, who refused to discuss the lords-protector with King Xuan of Qi because ‘none of the followers of Confucius spoke’ of them.”⁵⁴ What Xunzi proclaimed as the model for rulers is that of the True King, *wang*.

True Kings (*wang*) are not at all like this. Being the worthiest of men, they are able to help the unworthy. Being the strongest of men, they are able to be magnanimous toward the weak.⁵⁵

In Xunzi’s earlier view, only if a ruler adhered to moral principles and Confucian way, could he be regarded as a True King, who could be the moral exemplar for all rulers.

It is possible that his experience and the politics of his day led to a mature view that is more positive towards the *ba*. In the book of *Wang Ba*, Xunzi first classified three kinds of rulers:

One who uses the state to establish justice will be king (*wang*); one who establishes trust will be a lord-protector (*ba*); and one who establishes a record of expediency and opportunism will perish.⁵⁶

In Xunzi’s view, a ruler who could put the rituals into political practice could be regarded as a true King. This kind of ruler is Xunzi’s political and moral ideal, which could be identified as Tang and Wu in reality. Nevertheless, even if a ruler could not

⁵³ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 7.1.

⁵⁴ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, p. 53.

⁵⁵ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 7.1.

⁵⁶ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 11.1a.

act according to the ritual principles, once he establishes the governing order in a state and the trust among the states, he could be called a lord-protector, that is, *ba*. Xunzi said,

Although the moral force of their inner power had not yet reached perfection and although moral principles had not yet been fully attained, yet, in a general way, they displayed rational principles for ordering the world...Although from despised and backward countries, their majestic authority shook the whole world.

Such were the Five Lords-Protector (*ba*).⁵⁷

For Xunzi, although these five *ba* had not achieved the highest virtue possible for rulers, by establishing trust among the states and strengthening their own states, they could benefit their people. Here, Xunzi did not condemn the five *ba* or deny their accomplishments. Xunzi condemned only the third kind of ruler who fails to benefit the people at all.

In *Qiang Guo* chapter, Xunzi discussed the situation of the Qin state with regard to the difference between *wang* and *ba*. When he was asked about his impression of Qin state, which could be regarded as an example of *ba*, Xunzi at first praised Qin: “its defenses at the border barriers have a natural strength of position. Its topographical features are inherently advantageous.” And more important,

When I passed across the border, I noted that the customs and mores of the Hundred Clans were unspoiled...I saw the Hundred Officials sternly attend to their functions, none failing to be respectful, temperate, earnest, scrupulously

⁵⁷ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 11.1c.

reverential, loyal, and trustworthy, and never being deficient in the execution of their duties—just as were the officers of antiquity.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, after acknowledging a list of achievements of the Qin government, Xunzi criticized Qin for its lack of Ru scholars.

...it is dangerously lacking in Ru scholars. Thus, it is said: Those who possess the pure form are True Kings (*wang*); those who have the mixed form are lords-protector (*ba*); those who lack any at all are annihilated. This is precisely the shortcoming of Qin.⁵⁹

The lack of Ru scholars means that Qin did not fully apply the Confucian principle in governing. Thus, Xunzi certainly regarded the true King, that is, *wang*, as more admirable than *ba* who is not cultivated by Confucian moral principles. However, *ba* is very much needed in the time of the late Warring States period as it could provide a stable society and state for the people. In fact, *ba* might be the preparing stage for achieving the governing of *wang* in the late Warring States period. As analyzed before, under the instruction of *fa*, which is the fundamental governing principle of *ba*, the people could also be transformed to be moral. Thus, Xunzi discovered an innovative approach to achieve the Confucian political ideal of *wang*. This is a significant contribution to the political teachings of Confucianism.

In comparison with Mencius, Xunzi allowed some room for the not perfectly moral ruler who could still benefit the people. That is to say, *li* and *fa* should both be emphasized as instruments of governing. Only when the society and state are stable

⁵⁸ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 16.6.

⁵⁹ *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 16.6.

and orderly is it more likely that the people would conduct moral cultivation to lead to the moral ideal of *ren*. In Xunzi's time, without the governing of *ba*, a state could not even survive in a time of chaos, let alone unify the whole empire. In addition, during the governing of *ba*, the people could benefit from the strength and prosperity of a state. This is not a total departure from Confucius' tolerant attitude towards Duke Huan and Guan Zhong.

Shang Yang's Influence in Terms of Fa and Ba

As both Xunzi and Shang Yang regarded human *xing* as profit-loving, they both argued for the importance of law in controlling human *xing* and crafting an orderly society. Shang Yang said,

Therefore is an intelligent ruler cautious with regard to laws (*fa*) and regulations and placing reliance on men of fame and reputation; he does not hearken to words, which are not in accordance with the law; he does not exalt actions, which are not in accordance with the law; he does not perform deeds, which are not in accordance with the law.⁶⁰

Xunzi also said,

The reason that the model (*fa*) of the Three Dynasties still exists even though they have perished is that officers and bureaucrats have meticulously observed the rules and laws (*fa*), the weights and measures, criminal sanctions and penalties (*xing*), and maps and registers.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Duyvendak, *The Book of Lord Shang*, p. 317.

⁶¹ *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 4.7.

However, the primary concern of Shang Yang was to devise some kind of law and regulatory system to rule the people instead of cultivating them morally. For Xunzi, even if we could have an orderly society and stable state through the legal systems, we could not establish the highest level of good government without moral cultivation. When *li* and *fa* are both assumed, they could first instruct the people what they should and should not do; then they could transform them to be moral over a period of time. In this respect, Xunzi was different from Shang Yang.

For Shang Yang, once a government carries out laws and regulations fully, and the people could follow the course that government institutes, it could be called a good government. In this respect, the position of the people is not as important as that of government and law. In fact, the people might even be treated as a tool of the government in concentrating the power of the state and accumulating wealth and military strength in the state.⁶²

Xunzi, however, argued for a different view in terms of good governance. For Xunzi, laws and regulations are not the total content of governing; instead, aside from laws and regulations, *li* should be emphasized as the fundamental principle of governing. For Xunzi, *li* could transform human emotions and desires to be moral. In fact, even for *fa*, Xunzi also argued for its possibility of transforming humans to be moral. So, for Xunzi, a good government lies not only in the good social order *li* and *fa* could bring about, but also in the moral transformation of the people.

Some would argue, erroneously, that it is Xunzi who diverted Confucianism into

⁶² See Duyvendak, *The Book of Lord Shang*, p. 207.

Legalism incorporating law into his theory of good government. However, they did not realize that the goal of law is to serve the humanistic purposes in the context of *Xunzi*. It is just as Chung-Ying Cheng observes in an article,

We see that Confucianists never question the importance of *fa* in the general sense. A government will not be organized and function without its structure of rules or organization. Similarly, a society will not be in order if there is no normative sanction and prohibition. But the Confucianist would insist that for introducing any organization in government and norm in society, one must understand that such an organization and norm will serve the general humanistic and humanitarian purposes. It should preserve man as a self-fulfilling individual and society as a network for preserving and fulfilling humanity.⁶³

Thus, in sharp contrast with Shang Yang, humanity for Xunzi is the final purpose while laws and regulations are the tool. Due to their different concerns, we could absolutely say that Xunzi remained within the Confucian tradition even though he improved Confucianism by incorporating some elements from Legalism.

Xunzi's account of *ba* also sounds familiar when we examine the text of *Shang Jun Shu*.

So, too, the Three Kings (*wang*) conciliated people by righteousness and the five Lords Protector (*ba*) rectified the feudal lords by law; that is, in all these cases, none took for himself the benefits of the empire. They ruled for the sake of the empire, and thus, when those who held positions had corresponding merit, the

⁶³ Chung-Ying Cheng, "Legalism Versus Confucianism: A Philosophical Appraisal," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 8 (1981), pp.297 -298.

empire enjoyed their administration and no one could harm it. But nowadays, princes and ministers of a disorderly world each, on a small scale, appropriates the profits of his own state, and each exercised the burden of his own office, for his private benefit. This is why the states are in a perilous position. For the relation between public and private interests is what determines existence or ruin.⁶⁴

Thus, in Shang Yang, *wang* and *ba* have the common merits in governance, that is, the concern for the whole empire instead of themselves. Among them, *wang* governs with *yi*, while *ba* governs with *fa*. Although they are different in choosing the way of governing, their purposes are similar. That is, to preserve an orderly society and good government. For Shang Yang, what should be avoided is the ruler who only acquires the private benefit for himself. Xunzi was strikingly similar to Shang Yang in the view of *wang* and *ba* in that he regarded not only *wang*, but also *ba* as an acceptable way of governing. For Xunzi, the bad ruler who is “one who establishes a record of expediency and opportunism” resembles the kind of ruler Shang Yang condemned — one who “appropriates the profits of his own state, and each exercised the burden of his own office, for his private benefit.”

Conclusion

Xunzi attempted to solve the problem of what the government should do if the people are not willing to learn *li* and *fa* by borrowing from Legalism. For Xunzi, even if the

⁶⁴ Duyvendak, *The Book of Lord Shang*, pp. 263-264.

people are not willing to learn *li* and *fa*, the government could still carry out *li* and *fa* as a set of prescriptive rules and regulations, enforced by punishments, to control human behavior and preserve an orderly society. In Xunzi's view, *li* and *fa* can go beyond controlling people's behavior to serve as tools for cultivating people to become moral. Compared with Mencius, Xunzi was more realistic in advocating *li* and *fa*. Both Confucius and Mencius neglected the important transformational function of *fa* and this is the reason why they did not regard *fa* as the approach for achieving the highest standard of *ren* government.

Xunzi argued for the combination of *li* and *fa*, *wang* and *ba* in governing, which is more adaptable to the realities of the late Warring States period. Xunzi's views of *li* and *fa*, *wang* and *ba* were probably influenced by the teachings of Shang Yang which argues for the importance of *fa* and *ba* in his time. Xunzi assimilated some teachings about *fa* and *ba* from Shang Yang and modified their intended purposes so as to meet Confucian needs. In this respect, Xunzi adopted non-Confucian teachings in order to solve the problems in the political teachings of former Confucianism and to reconstruct Confucianism in the late Warring States period.

I have tried to show how Xunzi integrated some non-Confucian teachings into his own Confucian philosophy so as to strengthen Confucian theories of knowing, human nature and politics in order to reconstruct Confucianism. I hope I have shown how and to what extent non-Confucian teachings could be helpful in improving Confucianism. It is an aim of this dissertation to encourage more attention to this topic, that is, the comparison between the non-Confucian teachings and Confucianism,

from which, we might see not only how non-Confucian teachings could improve Confucianism, but also how Confucianism could be helpful in improving non-Confucian teachings. The in-depth study of the comparison between non-Confucian teachings and Confucianism would help us gain a deeper understanding of these once flourishing philosophers and their teachings in ancient Chinese historical context.

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